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MIKE SHAYNE

MYSTERY MAGAZINE

JANUARY, 1966

Vol. 18, No. 2

NEW MIKE SHAYNE SHORT NOVEL

THE SPY WHO WAS MIKE SHAYNE

by BRETT HALLIDAY

Somewhere deep inside Castro's Cuba lay hidden a secret which could explode the free world into war. All the C.I.A. asked Shayne to do was—get it—and come back alive!

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LEO MARGULIES

Publisher

CYLVIA KLEINMAN

Editorial Director

H. N. ALDEN

Associate Editor

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MYSTERY, DANGER AND SUDDEN DEATH LINK
HANDS IN THIS BIG ESPIONAGE NOVEL

THE SPY WHO WAS MIKE SHAYNE

by BRETT HALLIDAY

The CIA had handed Shayne the deadliest little caper of his career. All he had to do was go deep into Castro's Cuba, pocket an incredible plan for conquest—and somehow come out alive!



IT WAS A small fishing boat without name or number. Unnoticed in the dawn light, it glided slowly into the shore of Key Largo and lay hidden in the shadows of the trees.

After a time a tall, incredibly thin man emerged from the small cabin. His dark eyes stared slowly and carefully around at the silent and deserted land and water. He was a swarthy man, and his hands shook as he let out the anchor rope.

Having secured the boat with anchors fore

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A NEW COMPLETE SHORT NOVEL



and aft, the thin man slipped over the side and waded ashore. On shore he seemed to hesitate for a long time. Then, just as the sun appeared above the distant horizon, he shivered once and plunged into the underbrush.

Some time later, the morning sun already bright and hot, a chance watcher in the streets of Key Largo would have seen the thin man walking toward the bus stop, his swarthy face impassive, but his skeletal hands still shaking faintly.

Once he darted into the shadows of a doorway as two policemen approached along the main street. When they had passed on, he left his hiding place and walked faster toward the bus depot. A long blue and silver bus was already taking on passengers. The swarthy man boarded it.

The sun was high when the blue and silver bus rolled into the downtown depot of Miami. Only six passengers got off. One was the thin man with the dark eyes. His leathery face twitched slightly as he walked carefully from the bus depot into the crowded mid-day streets of the city.

Twice he stopped to stand as though looking into store windows, his dark eyes studying the street behind him, around him. Each time he appeared to see nothing and walked on.

He seemed to try to make himself smaller as he walked, and he

stayed close to the walls of the buildings as if aware that in his old fishing clothes he was slightly conspicuous among the well-dressed people of the city. But Miami is a sophisticated metropolis, and no one seemed to notice the swarthy fisherman.

He walked carefully, staring up at the street signs as he went. His lips moved as if spelling out the unfamiliar names. At last he stopped at a corner and read the name on the sign three times. Flagler Street. The thin man glanced cautiously around him again, then turned into Flagler Street.

A short heavy man wearing dark glasses stepped out of a doorway as the fisherman passed. This man was as swarthy as the thin fisherman, but much better fed. He moved casually along Flagler Street behind the fisherman.

The thin fisherman did not notice the man in the dark glasses, possibly because he had been in front of the tall man and not behind him. Unaware of the other man, the thin fisherman suddenly turned and entered a building.

The tall man hesitated for an instant as though confused by the chaos of sound and motion in the lobby of the busy office building.

The stocky man with the dark glasses came in and stood quietly near the elevators.

The fisherman saw the building directory on the lobby wall and

went up to it. He read the directory very slowly, his lips moving as they spelled out the words. But at last he seemed to find what he wanted, nodded to himself, looked around again, and walked to the elevators.

In the elevator, waiting, was the man with the dark glasses. Other people crowded into the elevator. The doors closed, and it began its slow ascent. Excited, perhaps, by the apparent nearness of his goal, the thin fisherman stepped out at his floor and turned down the corridor without looking back. The stocky man in the dark glasses slipped silently out behind him.

The door toward which the thin man now walked bore the legend: MICHAEL SHAYNE, *Private Investigator*.

The tall, skeletal man quickened his steps.

The man in the dark glasses drew a long-barrelled Luger from his pocket, aimed, and shot the tall man twice.

The shots roared and echoed down the corridor as the stocky man turned and vanished through the stairway door.

II

MIKE SHAYNE was thinking of the pleasure of a good lunch when the shots exploded like a shattering barrage just outside his office door.

Tim Rourke, who had been

about to share the good lunch with his friend Shayne, jumped up as if the shots had struck him. The elongated reporter looked at the detective with alarm.

"Are you—" Rourke began.

"Outside!" Shayne said sharply. "They weren't for me."

The door to his private inner office jumped open. Lucy Hamilton stood there. The brown-eyed secretary was pale.

"Stay in here and keep down, Angel," Shayne snapped. "Come on, Tim."

His automatic drawn, the red-head led Rourke out of his private office, through the outside office, and out into the corridor. Already other office doors were opening, and heads were peering out cautiously.

Shayne saw the figure of the emaciated man sprawled on the floor of the corridor. He also saw the stairway door close softly at the far end of the corridor. "Help him," he snapped to Rourke.

Rourke bent over the fallen man. Shayne dashed down the hall to the stairway door. He opened the door and looked down the stairwell. Far below he saw a vague figure running and heard the loud footsteps. Too far below. He could not catch up to the man now. He turned and went back to the wounded man.

Rourke looked up. "He's not dead," the lean reporter said. "Shot twice, leg and left shoulder.

He'll be okay if we get him to the hospital right away."

Shayne started toward the open door of his office, but Lucy Hamilton had anticipated him. The brown-eyed secretary, too curious to stay safely in the office, had seen it all, and had already gone to call the police and an ambulance.

Shayne turned back to the fallen man. The thin man moaned. His dark eyes opened, looked slowly around, narrowed with sudden pain.

"*Madre Dios*," the man muttered, his face white under the dark skin.

"You'll be okay," Tim Rourke said, bending over him.

The man turned his pained eyes toward Rourke and then toward Shayne.

"*Habla Espanol?*"

"You don't speak English?" Shayne asked.

The man shook his head, said, "No—speak—*Ingles*. *Uno—dos—word*."

"What are you?" Shayne said. "Spanish? Puerto Rican? Mexican? *Cubano?*"

"*Si, Cubano*," the man said. He stared up at the gaunt face of the redhead. He seemed to be studying Mike Shayne carefully through his pain. "You—are—Shayne? *Senor Shayne?*"

"Yes," Shayne said. "*Si, Shayne*."

The man tried to smile. "*Bueno*

—good. I—mess—I have—for you—pocket."

The man tried to move his hand toward the inside pocket of his fisherman's jacket. The pain was too much, and he fell back in agony.

Shayne watched him. The man apparently knew him, or had had Shayne described to him. And the man had something in his pocket. Shayne reached into the pocket. He brought out a small fishing lure, a wooden plug painted blue and silver to look like a bait fish.

The swarthy thin man nodded slowly. "You—take. You—give—*Alcalde—Presidente*."

"You want me to give this to the government?" Shayne said.

The man nodded. "*Si—give—*"

Shayne tugged on his left ear and looked at Rourke. The lean reporter was grim as he started down at the wounded man. Shayne knew what the elongated reporter was thinking. He spoke to the swarthy fisherman, who had again closed his eyes against the pain.

"What is this? A message? From whom?" Shayne said very slowly.

The man slowly shook his head to show that he did not understand. He did not open his eyes, but shook his head and shrugged painfully. Shayne studied the small wooden plug. He turned it in his big hands until he noticed a faint break in the wood that indicated

a joint. Carefully he twisted and the lure came apart.

Inside was a metal capsule. Inside the capsule was a tiny roll of dark celluloid—microfilm!

Shayne looked down at the man. "Do you know what this is?" he said.

The man opened his eyes. He looked at the film and shook his head. His eyes showed that he had probably never seen what was inside the wooden fishing plug. He looked at the small roll of microfilm with as much interest and surprise as he could have in his condition.

"You came from Cuba, now?" Rourke asked.

The man nodded.

"Who sent you?" Mike Shayne asked.

The man shrugged and winced with the pain of his shattered shoulder.

"You don't know who sent you?" Rourke said, puzzled.

The man shrugged again. Shayne tugged slowly on his left earlobe and studied the man on the corridor floor.

"He's a courier," Shayne said. "Someone in Cuba gave him this plug to deliver to me. He probably doesn't know what is on the film, or why it was sent, or who really sent him. That's the way they work these days."

"But, Mike," Rourke said, "someone had to tell him how to reach and recognize you."

Shayne nodded. He spoke again to the wounded man.

"How did you know to bring this to me? Why me? Who sent you to me?"

The wounded man opened his eyes and stared up at Mike Shayne. He seemed to be trying to remember something. He frowned as the pain throbbed through his eyes, and shook his head angrily as if to clear it of a thick fog. His eyes went flat, blank, as if they were turned inward to see something there.

When he spoke at last, it was obvious that he was repeating a carefully remembered phrase that he did not really understand.

"*Senor Michael Shayne. Say to Senor Shayne, 'The black cucaracha she never swim good.' Then give plug and tell give to Alcalde—Presidente—*"

Shayne rubbed his gaunt jaw. Rourke narrowed his eyes and looked at Shayne with a puzzled expression.

"The black cockroach never swam good?" Rourke repeated slowly. "Do you know what the hell that means, Mike?"

Shayne's grey eyes had become steel points as he thought. He still stared at the wounded man, who had closed his eyes again and had begun to shiver as the shock of his wounds took hold of him. Then Shayne began to nod. He even began to smile.

"I think I do, Tim. It's a refer-

ence to a case I had almost fifteen years ago. As far as I know it's a reference only one man in the world would make or even know. I had a black coupe in those days, and during the case it got pushed off a pier and sank."

"And only one person could send the message? Then it's meant to identify whoever sent this man to you," Rourke said.

"Luis Del Gardo," Shayne said. "That case was in Cuba. The black coupe was pushed into Havana Harbor. Luis Del Gardo was a Cuban private detective I worked with. Luis called the car The Black Cockroach. Luis and I were good friends. We'd worked on other cases. He must know that I'd recognize the message as coming from him and that no one else would."

"Then he sent this man and the microfilm," Rourke said. "Or at least he's working with the people who did."

Before Shayne could answer, the corridor was suddenly filled with police and white-uniformed ambulance attendants. The ambulance men carted off the wounded fisherman with stony-faced efficiency. Two uniformed policemen accompanied the men of mercy. The other police milled around the corridor looking busy. Lieutenant McGuire faced Shayne and Tim Rourke.

"Okay, Mike, tell it straight," McGuire said.

Shayne told it straight, including the microfilm. He left out the message from Luis Del Gardo. He had a strong hunch that Luis had gone to great pains to remain anonymous, and he did not want to be the one to put Luis in any danger.

"I better take that film, Mike," Lieutenant McGuire said. "You sure you never saw this guy before?"

"I'm sure," Shayne said bluntly, "and I don't think you better take the microfilm. I think we all better talk to Will Gentry."

Lieutenant McGuire prepared to explode, but he looked at the grim set of Shayne's jaw and changed his mind. The lieutenant led the way to the elevator without another word. Mike Shayne and Tim Rourke followed in silence.

III

IT WAS Luis Del Gardo, Will. I'm sure," Shayne said.

Will Gentry, Chief of Miami Police, said nothing. The gruff chief let his heavy-browed eyes turn toward the other men in the office. For a long minute no one said anything. The silence was thick in Gentry's large new office.

The Chief did little actual police work any more, but this was not ordinary police work. The two men Gentry now looked at were not ordinary police. And these

two men were looking at Tim Rourke.

"This is highly confidential, Chief Gentry," one of the men said.

"Rourke is a witness," Gentry said. "Tim, everything you hear is off the record. In fact, you never heard it, right?"

"If you say so, Will," the lean reporter said.

"I say so," Gentry snapped gruffly.

The two men appeared satisfied, if still reluctant and wary. They turned their attention to Mike Shayne. The one who had spoken first was short and slender, a young man who looked more like a junior tennis champion than what he actually was—Agent Morton Cummings, Central Intelligence Agency, Case Officer for the Miami region.

Some ten hours had passed since the Cuban fisherman had been shot in front of Shayne's office. Shayne had told the details to Will Gentry, and the police chief had taken the microfilm and started the wheels turning. An hour ago the wheels had turned up the fifth man in the room: Mervyn Davis, principal agent in the West Indies region for British MI-6. A tall, spare man as bald as a beach stone, it was Davis who spoke next.

"Very well, Chief," Davis said in his clipped accents. "Mr. Shayne, why would your Del Gar-

do attempt to contact you? Have you had any contact with him recently?"

"No," Shayne said. "I haven't seen or heard of Luis since Castro took over down there, maybe a little before that."

"Do you think he favored the Castro takeover?" Morton Cummings asked. The CIA man spoke as softly and casually as Davis was hard and clipped.

"I think he did," Shayne said evenly. "In fact, I'm sure of it. A lot of good Cubans favored Castro."

"By which you imply he may have changed his mind?" Davis said.

Shayne smiled. "Luis was a good patriot and a good democrat. He believed in Cuban freedom. I think he would be very likely to change his mind if what we hear about Cuba now is true. Besides, a man doesn't send a courier with microfilm and a secret message of identification unless he's up to something. And I assume the microfilm was pretty important to bring you two down here so fast."

There was another silence. Rourke and Gentry watched the smiling Mike Shayne. Davis and Cummings looked at each other. The CIA man nodded as if to himself, and turned to face Shayne.

"Mr. Shayne, we've checked out that film and the man who brought it. I'm sure you know that we have our ways. The man is a

fisherman, as he says he is. His boat checks out all the way. Davis here says MI-6 has encountered him before as a courier for the Cuban underground.

"The film is more than important, it is vital. I'm authorized to take the chance of filling you in on it. Briefly, the film is a photographic copy of a series of documents giving full organizational details, and a partial timetable, of a Castro revolution in some other Central or South American country. I can't exaggerate how important it is, or how high a source inside the Castro regime it must have come from.

"Finally, the brief look our fisherman courier had of his attacker is highly significant to us. From his description the man who shot him is almost certainly Machado Arrellaga, principal agent, or 'resident director' as the Soviets call such men, for Castro's Intelligence in the whole Florida, Bahama, and British West Indies area.

"We know Arrellaga only too well, but he is a careful and efficient man. We have no proof as yet. A by-product of this affair could be that we can nail Arrellaga. We suspect he is even more than a Castro chief agent; he is a Soviet agent. We want him badly, but we want the rest of this microfilm much more. Do you understand?"

The two chief intelligence agents were leaning forward in

their chairs, watching Shayne closely. Rourke and Gentry were looking at the redhead with a certain questioning in their eyes. Shayne himself did not even move in his chair.

"You want me to get the rest of the microfilm if it even exists," Shayne said bluntly. "I'm no spy. I wouldn't know how to start. You must have a hundred agents who know what to do. You found out more about that fisherman and the film in ten hours than I could have in ten weeks!"

Cumming's soft voice was low. "But you know Luis Del Gardo, and he knows you."

Shayne said nothing. The big redhead showed nothing on his gaunt face as he looked at Cummings. The CIA man went on.

"He sent the courier to you, Shayne. He trusts you. He most likely intended to send the rest of the film to you, but the courier won't return, and Arrellaga is clearly suspicious. Del Gardo probably won't risk another attempt, and might not be able to even if he dared."

The British MI-6 man, Mervyn Davis, stood up and began to pace the quiet office. The tall, spare man rubbed his bald head as he strode like some great scarecrow through Gentry's office.

"Shayne, I flew all the way up from Kingston, I dropped all my work, for one reason," Davis said crisply. The tall Britisher stared

straight at Shayne. "The deputy chief of the Foreign Department of the Cuban State Committee of Liberation Affairs is Luis Del Gardo!"

Rourke whistled, and Mike Shayne began to tug hard on his earlobe. The redhead watched Mervyn Davis. The Englishman continued his pacing. Shayne asked the question.

"You think my old private detective friend and this big official are one and the same man," Shayne said.

"We don't know," Davis snapped, "but it's too important to overlook. If they are the same, we need you. We do know that Deputy Chief Del Gardo was formerly a captain in Castro's army, he speaks English, he is known to have worked at times in the United States, is considered an expert on propaganda work in foreign countries."

Shayne nodded. "Luis could be all that. He got around a lot in his work, and he was a bright boy. All right, let's say this deputy chief is my Luis. You people must have more efficient ways of reaching him than using an amateur like me."

The CIA man, Cummings, cut in. "In the first place, Shayne, you're a detective. You've done this kind of work, and you can handle yourself," Cummings pointed out. "Second, we didn't choose you. Del Gardo did. We

don't have much contact in Havana these days, as you know, no embassy or consular people for Del Gardo to approach. We have agents, of course, and Del Gardo might even know some of our or MI-6, people. But if he knows them, then the Cuban secret police probably do also, and that would make it far too dangerous for him to contact them."

Tim Rourke agreed. "That adds up, Mike. Del Gardo wanted to get in touch with us, but he didn't know how. He had a contact with underground couriers, but—"

Davis broke in. The Englishman was sharp and annoyed.

"But a man like Del Gardo doesn't just send someone to some American official with information that he is turning traitor! No, he would not want even the courier to know who he was. So he very logically got the film to the courier anonymously, and gave him an identifying message for a man he knew and who would know him."

Gentry added, "A man he knew would have contacts. He must know you know me, that I can vouch for you and pass on the film to the right people."

Shayne began to rub his chin. "Yes, it's logical—if it *is* the same Luis Del Gardo, and if he did want to contact the CIA. As you say he couldn't make any contact in Havana. He would have to be very careful how he did it. It would be like Luis to remember

me. He'd know I was safe, I'd know him from the safe message, and I could make the contact for him with CIA."

"Exactly," Cummings said. "Will you do it?"

Shayne smiled. "I don't have much choice, do I? You say it's vital, and it looks like I'm the only man who can get to Luis. He'll know me, and I'll know him. No advance plans needed. I just have to show up where he can see me, and he'll know I got the first batch of film."

"That's it, Shayne," Davis said, his sharpness much mollified now. "Naturally, we'll get you in and out of Cuba. We'll send some men with you to help, protect, and get you in contact with the underground. They'll get you to Del Gardo. If it's the same man, the rest is up to you."

"Thanks," Shayne said drily. "When do I go?"

"Tonight," Cummings said.

"You don't waste time," Shayne said. "You must have been pretty sure."

"There isn't time to waste," Davis said.

"Arrellaga?" Shayne said. "He must know something. He could have beaten us, got to Del Gardo already."

"We have to hope he hasn't," Davis said.

Shayne tugged on his earlobe. "Machado Arrellaga could have seen me in the corridor. He must

know the courier was coming to me."

"We think not. We think he just spotted the courier and trailed him," Cummings said.

"Without knowing his mission or destination?" Shayne said.

"He shot at the last minute," Davis said. "In the corridor. We think that he was afraid that if he waited any longer he would lose his man. If he had known what that courier was carrying, he could have waylaid him at many better places."

Shayne rubbed his jaw. "If you're wrong, I'm a sitting duck."

Davis shrugged. "Let's hope we're right, Mr. Shayne."

Shayne said nothing. The big redhead just sat there in the silent office and looked at them all. Neither Gentry nor Rourke looked very happy. Davis and Cummings were neither happy nor unhappy—they were thinking of Luis Del Gardo sitting in Havana with all that information.

Shayne thought of the danger Del Gardo might be in, and of the courier shot down in the corridor of the Flagler Street building in broad daylight, and of what might be waiting for him in Havana.

IV

KEY WEST WAS no more than a faint haze behind them in the twilight before the two agents nodded to Mike Shayne. They all

left their hiding place beneath the nets of the fishing boat and emerged onto the open deck. The man at the wheel, and the three supposed crew members, went about their work as if Shayne and the two agents did not exist.

The two agents, whose names Shayne still did not know, even after hiding with them under the nets for four hours, were not Davis and Cumings. Those worthies were too high up to ride smelly fishing boats to Cuba, or to do the kind of dirty work that was coming up.

One of the agents stretched his back gingerly. He was a thin old man who looked like a bookkeeper and wore the neat business clothes of a bookkeeper. The old man looked back toward the lights of Key West in the purple-black late evening.

"You spend your life hiding," the old man said. "A hell of an existence, but there is no other way. Probably five Castro agents on the Key West docks, and you're much too big to miss, Shayne. You'd never last as an agent—red hair, a face no one could forget, as big as a truck. Never last."

"Let's hope I last for one job," Shayne said drily.

"Always hope, eh?" the old man said. "Alden Saunders is my name. Not my real one, of course. Almost forgotten my real name, it's been so long. MI-6. Four years in Havana. Six years Prague before



that. My last job, this one. Out of it after this. Too old."

Shayne looked ahead across the darkening sea toward the unseen island of Cuba, the Pearl of the Antilles.

"How is Havana? Tough?" Shayne said.

"We'll get you through," Saunders said.

The old man smoothed his white hair and stared ahead. Shayne looked toward the second agent, a small, stocky man dressed in the clothes of a trawler fisherman. The stocky man had the dark skin of a native Cuban.

He saw Shayne watching him. "Rodrigo Cota," the stocky man said. "CIA."

"Cuban?" Shayne asked.

"Does it matter?"

"No," Shayne said. "I just like to know the odds. A Cuban on the job would make me feel better."

"Sorry then. Puerto Rican," Cota said. "But I know Cuba almost as well as Saunders. We'll do what we can."

"Thanks," Shayne said.

Cota looked at him. "Listen, Shayne, I don't like amateurs. They make it more dangerous for me, see? But we'll get you in, and if you're still alive, we'll get you out."

"You're encouraging," Shayne said.

Cota didn't smile. "Now hear this good. In the dark we can stay up on deck, but we stay alert. Real alert, see? No smoking, no talking, no moving around. Got it?"

"Can I breathe?"

Cota stared. "They got patrol boats, Shayne. In the dark a patrol boat can be on top of us so fast and quiet you'd swear they come up out of the water. They got searchlights. One look at you, Saunders, and me on deck and we don't make it. They know how many men should be on this boat. They probably know what the crew looks like. Just listen to me. One hiss and you dive for cover."

"Check," Shayne said. He waited, but Cota did not speak again.

Saunders had lapsed into silence, staring ahead as if mesmerized by the distant, unseen island before them. The fishing boat chugged on at its slow pace. Below the innocent decks two powerful

engines were hidden, but those were only for an emergency. Now the boat wallowed over the sea at the pace of a normal slow fishing boat.

Hours passed.

The dark sea rolled and heaved about the small boat. White teeth seemed to slash at the black night. There were no lights beyond the small boat, and no one spoke. The old British agent Saunders never moved or shifted his glance from straight ahead toward the distant dangers of Cuba. There was the smell of fear about the old man. It worried Mike Shayne.

"Don't worry about it, Shayne," Saunders said suddenly. His voice was low and soft, yet clear. Shayne realized that the voice would not carry beyond ten feet. A trick of training.

"Fear keeps you alive," Saunders said, still staring straight ahead. "Always be afraid. We had a boy once, bravest man I ever met. Not a nerve in his body, no fear at all. He never came back from his first job."

"What happened?" Shayne whispered. His voice sounded almost like a shout in his ears.

"Shut up!" Cota hissed in the same trick voice as Saunders.

Shayne nodded. He had not learned the trick of voice.

"We never knew," Saunders said. "He was so confident. Fear, that's the life preserver, Shayne. Be afraid. Be alert every step,

afraid every step, and you'll do the job."

The night hung black. Twice Cota hissed and they went down beneath the bulkhead. Shayne saw nothing either time. Only once, very faint and silent, he thought he saw a shape pass far off in the darkness. A shape without lights of any kind. He knew it was a patrol boat. Whose he did not know. It did not matter.

Cota and Saunders took no chances. Shayne was beginning to learn. For the next hours he catnapped under the gunwale.

They reached Cuba just before dawn. The heavy darkness of the hours just before the dawn would break. Shayne could see nothing. He stared, but all he saw was black water. The only way he knew they had arrived somewhere was that the whitecaps of the open sea had gone. The water was smooth, black and invisible.

And then Shayne sensed it.

"Quick," Cota said, "over the side!"

Something loomed close in the night. Unseen, no more than a heavy presence, but there.

"Now, Shayne," Saunders whispered.

Shayne went over the side, hanging for a second on the gunwale, lowering himself into the water almost as silently as the two agents. They trod water beside him. They did not speak again.

Cota touched him and mo-

tioned. Shayne began to swim after the silent Cota. A slow sidestroke with Saunders behind him, the old man's white hair the only thing faintly visible in the dark.

They had gone perhaps a hundred feet, the fishing boat almost vanished, when the light suddenly blazed out and illuminated the boat like a moth spitted on a long needle.

Voices shouted in curt Spanish. The patrol boat moved in close to the fishing boat. On the fishing boat the crew stood in light as bright as day. The voices from the patrol boat shouted for a few more minutes. Then the searchlight went off and the patrol boat roared away.

Shayne's feet touched bottom.

He began to wade through the water up to shore. The stocky figure of Cota stood waiting. Saunders followed Shayne from the sea to a narrow beach bordered by thick foliage.

Cota spoke in his trained whisper. "I don't like it."

"They didn't search the boat," Saunders said.

"Is that bad?" Shayne whispered.

"They should have boarded, searched," Cota said, his voice tense under its soft whisper. "They didn't. Something's wrong."

"You think perhaps they've been tipped?" Saunders said.

"Arrellaga?" Shayne said.

"Maybe," Cota said. "We bet-

ter assume so. All right, we assume they expect us. They expect someone."

"What do we do?" Shayne asked.

"We give them someone," Cota said. "It has to be me, Saunders."

"Check," Saunders said. "It's you. What have you got? Radio, dynamite?"

"Dynamite will do. I've got some sticks. I'll—" Rodrigo Cota began.

Shayne protested. "Can't we all try? Why you alone? I figure we should—"

Cota silenced him. "Our job is to get you to Del Gardo. We don't take a chance on getting us all through. That's amateur work, Shayne. Never risk the mission; always assume the enemy is on to you."

"And I'm needed in Havana," Saunders said. "It's Cota. Don't worry, Shayne. He might get out of it. But now he has to divert them. You better get moving, Cota."

"Right. I'll lead them a good chase. They'll pick me up with the dynamite. When you contact the underground, tell them. Maybe they can get me out."

"Move on," Saunders said simply.

Cota vanished into the night. Shayne waited. After a few minutes he heard the noise. Cota was making noise in the brush that bordered the beach some two hun-

dred yards up. Suddenly, he heard more noise, very faint.

A small group of men were moving through the bushes toward Cota.

"Patrol," Saunders said curtly. "Militia, from the sound of them. Cota may handle them. At least it's not regulars or secret police. Come on."

Shayne followed the old man up the beach and into the brush. He realized that Saunders was leading him directly through the area where the militia patrol had been! He nodded to himself. They took few chances. There could be another patrol anywhere in the area—except exactly where the first patrol had been!

They moved inland in the dark and Saunders did not speak again. To Mike Shayne they seemed to walk for miles as the grey dawn light began to break over the island.

In his mind he went over his cover. The papers he carried said he was one Sam Cabrillo, an American Communist who worked for Castro and was known to speak very little Spanish. The real Sam Cabrillo was safely in an American jail, a fact not yet known to the Cubans—Mike Shayne hoped.

The four men materialized from the bushes in the grey light just as Saunders and Shayne reached a narrow dirt road. They were thin, ragged men dressed like all the peasants who worked the sugar

cane fields. They were all armed with old American M-1 rifles.

Saunders spoke to them in rapid Spanish. The four men listened, and two of them turned and ran off into the bushes back in the direction of the beach. Saunders turned to Shayne.

"We split up here, Shayne. These are underground militiamen. One of them will go with you. We're getting into populated country. Skulking is now too dangerous."

"I use my cover now?" Shayne said.

"Right. The man with you also has proper papers. They have a jeep ready. The man with you knows where to go in Havana. I'll be there myself. Wait for me because you'll need me in Havana. If anything goes wrong, go to twelve Plaza de Madre. Good luck."

Shayne nodded, and watched the British agent walk away and vanish into the brush with the fourth militiaman. He knew that the first two had gone to see what they could do for Cota. His own underground companion now touched him and pointed up the dirt road to where a jeep waited.

Mike Shayne nodded and walked to the jeep. A few moments later they drove out onto a macadam highway that ran along the coast of the great island.

They drove in silence, the militiaman speaking no English. The



sun was halfway up the sky when Shayne saw, ahead, the first buildings of Havana. The Miami private detective looked toward the familiar city and remembered many good times he had had there: remembered the sparkle of the great harbor; the bulk of Moro Castle at the entrance; the dazzling hotels and exciting elegance of the casinos and cabarets. That was all changed now, the gamblers and American money long gone, the tourists reduced to a trickle, the foreign investors vanished, the cruise ships no longer on the water of the grand harbor.

"Policia!"

The underground man hissed in his ear. Ahead Mike Shayne saw the six uniformed men standing in the center of the road. A police car, Russian-made, was parked at the side of the road, where the shacks and slums of the outskirts loomed among the tropical foliage. One uniformed man stepped up to the jeep as Shayne stopped. He wore the uniform of a captain.

The police captain spoke sharply in Spanish. The underground man handed over his papers. The captain looked at them, then at Mike Shayne.

The underground man said something in Spanish.

Shayne understood enough Spanish to know that the underground man was telling the captain that he, Shayne, was the famous Sam Cabrillo, and spoke no Spanish.

"Perhaps I will learn when there is time," Shayne said. "After the Revolution is secure, eh *Capitan?*"

The captain stared at Shayne. "I have heard of Comrade Cabrillo. Your papers, *gracia?*"

Shayne handed over his fake papers. The captain studied them, nodded. The papers listed Santiago as Cabrillo's base. The captain handed the papers back to Shayne.

"All goes well in Santiago?" the captain asked.

"As well as can be expected with the Yankees at Guantana-mo," Shayne said.

"True, but they will not always be there, eh?" the captain said.

"It is our land," Shayne, as the fake Cabrillo, said.

"True," the captain said. "I salute you, comrade."

The captain raised his fist in the bent-arm salute of the Communist Party. The captain was a Party member, and the salute was the

greeting of one member to another.

Shayne raised his clenched fist, smiled, and nodded to the underground man to drive on. His fist still raised in salute, he smiled again at the captain.

Shayne froze with the smile on his face. He was suddenly aware of his own fist in the air. The captain had already turned away. Now the captain seemed to hesitate.

The underground man slipped his hand into his pocket.

Shayne lowered his hand.

The captain began to turn, his dark eyes hard and flat.

Shayne had given the Communist salute with his *right* hand.

In his haste to get moving, to move away from the police, he had saluted with the wrong hand. A small thing, but Sam Cabrillo was an old Party man, a veteran, and the left-hand salute would have been second nature. Small, but enough to ask questions.

The captain had turned very slowly to face Shayne.

Shayne sat in the jeep, his automatic tucked inside his coat, the captain staring at him, and the five other policemen all around with their rifles aimed.

V

THE UNDERGROUND man moved. The thin peasant had a pistol in his work-scarred hand.

The police captain went down on his face, clawing for his own pistol, bawling out orders in Spanish. His five men hit the dirt. The underground man hurled himself out of the jeep with Mike Shayne right behind him.

Shayne dug for his automatic. The underground man kicked him hard, motioning wildly. Shayne saw the ditch beside the road, and the thick undergrowth that led from the ditch and up to the nearest slum dwellings. There was cover all the way to the houses, and heavy junglelike growth beyond. But there were a half-dozen policemen!

The underground man did not wait. He rolled away from the shelter of the jeep, reached the ditch, and ran crouching toward the east away from Havana. He ran noisily.

Shayne understood. The man was attempting to lure the police away.

Shayne rolled for the ditch.

He reached the ditch and came up with his automatic ready. He knew instantly that there was not enough cover against six men, five armed with rifles. He braced for the fusillade, and the roar of shots came.

But by some miracle no bullets came his way.

He raised his head an inch over the edge of the ditch. He blinked as he stared. The police captain, and all his men, were in hot pur-

suit of the shooting underground man. Shayne almost laughed.

It was amateur work. The Soviet experts would have been horrified by such stupidity. The volatile Latins, it seemed, were all pursuing the shooting man when it was the other man, Mike Shayne, they should have been after.

Shayne did not look again. There was no way to tell when the captain would realize his error. He ran crouched low down the ditch, into the heavy growth and the maze of slum shacks. He ran for a long time, his automatic out, before he knew that he had escaped. He put away his automatic, brushed off his clothes, and began to walk more slowly and carefully toward the heart of the city.

The slums and foliage slowly gave way to the streets and apartments of the great city. Mike Shayne knew Havana, and he quickly knew where he was. He had half the city to cross to reach Plaza De Madres.

The mid-morning streets were crowded, but they were not the same. Gone was the hectic milling of the careless people he remembered. There was more seriousness, less laughter. There were fewer cars. The *cantinas* were fewer and less crowded; the street-peddlers, beggars and musicians were gone. There were fewer foreigners and more police.

The foreigners were not tourists, and police walked in twos and

threes everywhere. Shayne imitated the actions of the conspicuous foreigners, and walked briskly through the streets toward the Plaza De Madres. When he saw the police, he faded into the shadows and the doorways. Twice he turned into a *cantina* to dodge the patrols. In one *cantina* he ate a sandwich.

He crossed the city slowly and carefully. There was no way of knowing just how much that captain at the road had reported. For all he knew half the city could be looking for a big, gaunt redheaded man by now. And his papers said he was Sam Cabrillo. The captain would report that he had Cabrillo's papers. He could not risk being stopped, or even seen by any police—and the city seemed half-populated by them.

Moving slowly and carefully, and yet not so carefully as to attract the attention of the citizens, it was late afternoon when he finally reached his destination.

There had been no trouble. He stood in the shelter of a doorway and looked across the open area of the small plaza toward the silent doorway of Number 12.

Nothing seemed to move behind the dark windows of Number 12. The door was closed, and the gate that led to the rear patio was also closed. Here and there in the open plaza people walked, but nothing moved near Number 12. The windows were closed. The house

seemed dead, lifeless, and Shayne began to tug on his left earlobe.

There was something wrong about the place.

Shayne could not put it into words, or even concrete thoughts, but he sensed something. He smiled grimly to himself—Mike Shayne was learning how to be a spy. *Alert every step, afraid every step, and you'll do the job.* He was alert, and he was afraid enough.

His grey eyes became steel points as they studied the silent facade of Number 12. The presence of people shows. He knew that. He could not say how he knew that, but it was one thing he had learned in his years as a detective. When people are in a house, you sense it. This house was dead.

And he was late.

They should have been waiting, whoever he was to meet. They and Alden Saunders. But he was sure that there was nothing in that house—nothing alive.

He also knew that the underground man who he had left on the road with the police after him had known where they were going. And yet he was more than sure that the underground man would not have been taken alive if he could help it. But perhaps he had not been able to help it—and they had ways to make a man talk fast and long.

In the shadow of the doorway he waited for over an hour as the afternoon wore on toward eve-

ning. Nothing moved at all near, around, or in Number 12.

He could not wait longer.

With a deep breath, and firm grip on the automatic in his side pocket, Mike Shayne left the doorway and crossed the street casually but quickly. He found the patio gate unlocked. He entered, closed the gate behind him, and moved quietly into the cool shade of the silent patio.

The smell was unmistakable. It hung in the air like heavy incense. But it was deadly incense—the odor of gunpowder, smokeless powder.

Spent shells littered the tiles of the patio; blackened cartridge cases were lying on the beautiful colored mosaics.

Shayne moved cautiously inside the house—and knew at once that he had made a mistake! *Never risk the mission, always assume the enemy is on to you.* The mission was his job, and what had happened here made no difference now. His course was clear—leave, walk away fast. It was a hundred to one they were waiting for him.

But they were not!

He was inside the house, and the silence was as thick as ever. He found the first body in the first room. A girl, no more than twenty, shot through the heart. There were two more bodies in the room, both men. In the next room there were three more bodies. He found no more victims until he reached a

small room at the far rear of the patio.

Rodrigo Cota, and the nameless underground peasant he had last seen on the road luring the police from him, were lying in this last room. They had been lined up against a wall and shot. Pinned to each man's chest was a piece of paper with a single word on it—*Gracias!*

Shayne looked down at them. The meaning was clear. It was hard to believe that Cota or the unlucky peasant had led the police here, but that was all it could mean. Some sadistic police officer's idea of humor. There was no other conclusion. The two men had not died with the others, in a sudden battle, but had been brought to the house and executed.

Somehow, either Cota or the peasant had led the police here.

Shayne found that hard to believe. Torture would not have torn the information from them—or would it? Then he heard the words of Cota again, *We don't take a chance on getting us all through. That's amateur work. Never risk the mission.*

He, Shayne, was the mission—and he was alive, free, and no one had been waiting here for him.

The gaunt redhead shuddered as he looked down at the dead men. Was it possible? Had they told enough, but not all? Had they told about this place, sacrificed all these people and themselves, to

make the police believe they had no more to tell—and so save Mike Shayne?

That was one explanation of why no one was here waiting for him. They had not told about him. Had they sacrificed themselves, all their comrades in this silent and bloody house, for him? For the mission?

He knew suddenly that it did not matter. It was not his concern now. He was really learning the work of a spy. His job was the mission. And he was alone. Saunders might still be alive somewhere, but that did not matter now. He had no way to contact Saunders. He could not wait here. There was no one now but himself—a spy alone in the heart of Havana.

Somehow he would have to do the job alone.

He turned, recrossed the patio, and stopped thinking about the bloody rooms behind him. It was his job now to reach Luis Del Gardo, get the film, and get it back to America. He was on his own.

VI

THERE WERE four of them. Russian soldiers in Russian uniforms. One of them was a big man, tall and heavy and rawboned. A man of Mike Shayne's exact build. Shayne followed them as they staggered their way through the

subdued but still active night life of Havana.

He had spotted them while he had been watching the heavily-guarded entrance to the building where Luis Del Gardo had his office. The old Hotel Trocadero. Shayne knew the building well. Once it had been one of the finest and most elegant hotels in Havana, its ballroom the grandest, its gambling rooms the richest, its girls the prettiest. Now it housed offices of the new government. One of the offices was the headquarters of The State Committee of Liberation Affairs.

It had been simple to find that out. He had looked in the telephone book! Sometimes the obvious was the best. But no Del Gardo was listed, and Shayne could not have called anyway. Somehow he had to let Luis see him—if it were the same Luis Del Gardo. Even that was still not certain.

To reach the old Hotel Trocadero had not been quite as simple. Shayne had hidden in doorways until dark, and then had moved very slowly, very cautiously through the city toward the building. He had found it easier than during the day. There was still night life, and even the police seemed to relax with the coming of night.

Shayne had reached a point across the street from the old Trocadero, and there he had stopped.



The entrance was closely guarded. He saw that all who went in presented their papers at the door.

From time to time uniformed militiamen came out to smoke. It was clear that there were more guards inside the building, probably on each floor. When anyone came out, he handed a pass to the guards. The pass was undoubtedly countersigned by whoever they had been to visit.

A dash for the entrance would be suicide. There was a wide open space before the entrance, and

Shayne noted that the guards watched everyone who approached. There were no rear or side entrances at least, there were none he could see in one long, slow circuit of the building. A wall, ten feet high, had been built all around the lower floor.

It looked hopeless, and Shayne, back in his hidden doorway across the wide street before the entrance, had begun to think that there was nothing he could do but wait for Del Gardo to appear, sometime, outside the building, when he saw

the first soldiers. Russian soldiers, wearing Russian uniforms!

They came out of the building without presenting passes, without pausing to speak to the guards!

Shayne watched them walk away along the street toward the gaudier sections of the city, where there was noise and laughter. Soldiers were the same everywhere, at any time. But that was not what concerned Shayne now. The Russians had come out without passes or a challenge. The guards had merely stood and watched them.

Shayne settled down to watch longer. Two hours passed. Two more groups of Russian soldiers came out. None were challenged or even spoken to. The militia looked, and the Russians passed as if the militia did not exist. All the Russians wore the same insignia. It was clear that some unit was billeted in the building.

A unit that was not questioned!

Mike Shayne tugged slowly on his ear and smiled grimly to himself. It was a mistake by the enemy. The Russians, proud and arrogant, insisted on their rights. The powerful nation, the leader, they were above the local law, bound by, and answerable to, no authority but their own. It was a mistake many strong nations had made in many places, and it would serve to get Mike Shayne into the building.

He waited in his hidden doorway, watching as more of the Soviet soldiers came out. They came

faster, more frequently, all laughing and talking as they went out for their night in Havana. They were enjoying themselves, the way soldiers of all the armies of the world enjoy themselves in good, safe, exciting overseas posts. It was obvious that they had both their quarters and their mess inside the building, and dinner was now over.

The group of four appeared at last. One of the four was the big, gaunt, rawboned man just about Shayne's build. The redhead left his doorway and followed them into the heart of Havana's night life.

Now he still followed them as they staggered from cabaret to cabaret. They were loud, laughing, happy. They had no cares in the world—they were Soviet soldiers in a friendly country.

They worked hard and they played hard. From their point of view life was just fine. From Shayne's point of view, lurking in the streets of Havana with his life hanging by a thread, they were his one chance for safety.

Shayne followed them, waiting for his chance. Four were too many to jump even as drunk as they were now. Besides, he could not leave witnesses to set up a hue and cry after the attacker of a Russian soldier. So he followed through the gaudy night of Havana cabarets and nightclubs, alert and jumping at every unseen

sound. At last the group split. Only one man was with the big one when they emerged from the next club.

Shayne decided he could wait no longer. He would have to attack the two of them. Through the neon night of Havana he followed the two toward the next cabaret. They were very drunk now, bouncing against the buildings, staggering toward the gutters, the small Cubans giving them wide berth.

Shayne searched for the right place, and saw it not fifty feet ahead—one of the many small alleys that ran dark between the buildings of the city. He moved swiftly ahead of the two drunks and ducked into the alley. There was no light inside the alley, nothing but the cold stones, the garbage cans, and the scurrying feet of the rats.

Shayne drew his automatic, fitted on the silencer, and waited.

The two Soviet soldiers staggered across the mouth of the alley. Shayne was in luck. For a moment, there was no one else close to the alley, and cars suddenly filled the street.

Shayne stepped to the mouth of the alley and hissed to the soldiers. "*Amigos! Tovarich!*"

The two Russians stopped, swayed, stared into the alley.

Shayne stepped out an inch or so. He smiled at them, a leering smile. "*Senoritas, si?*" he leered.

The two soldiers stared. The big one licked his lips, and lunged toward the dark alley after Shayne, his red eyes squinting into the darkness.

Shayne sidestepped the drunken lunge, and slammed his heavy automatic against the side of the soldier's head. The big Russian went down and out.

The second soldier jumped into the alley toward Shayne. The red-head turned and shot. The silenced automatic spat twice, and the second soldier slammed backwards into the side wall and fell forward on his face.

Instantly, Mike Shayne dragged the dead soldier back into the deep shadows. He dragged the big, unconscious soldier in beside his dead comrade.

Hurriedly, Shayne began to strip both men. He ripped off the blood-stained uniform of the dead man, rolled it into a bundle, and set it on the ground. He carefully checked the dead man for any identification and removed all of it. Then he turned to the unconscious big man and stripped him. He removed all marks of identification.

He dressed in the big soldier's uniform. It was a fair fit. Not perfect, but it would do the trick. He pulled the cap as low as possible to cover his red hair. He rolled all the excess clothes and identification into a tight bundle. He was ready to leave the alley. His own

clothes were hidden under the uniform.

Before he left he turned again toward the big man. There was one more thing he had to do. It wasn't to his liking, but there was no other way. He raised his silenced automatic and shot the big man dead.

Then he left the alley.

He walked out into the streets of Havana, carefully, not wanting to meet any other Russian soldiers. He felt sick to his stomach. But cold reason cut through his qualms. They had to be killed, both of them. It was another lesson for Mike Shayne the spy. Take no chances at all. He needed as much time as he could get. Now the only men who could have told what had happened in the alley were dead men!

When the Russians were finally found there would be no way of telling who or what they were—naked dead men tell few tales. They would be identified, but that might take a whole day, perhaps longer. Two lives for a little time. He was learning fast. He dropped the bundle of clothes and identification tags into an open sewer.

He reached his doorway across from the old Hotel Trocadero without incident. He had avoided the Russians, and the Cubans had avoided him. In the doorway he paused just long enough to slow his rapid breathing and to prepare his mind to be a Russian soldier.

The way an actor prepares for his entrance on stage.

He stepped out and began to walk boldly toward the entrance of the building.

It was near midnight now, and the guards at the door were yawning with weariness. Shayne had guessed that a new shift would come on soon. He watched as the sleepy guards came alert as he approached. They were well disciplined. They watched him all the way. An officer stepped forward to challenge him.

Then the officer, and the men, saw the Russian uniform. The officer shrugged faintly and turned away. The men slouched again against their posts. One began to light a cigarette. Shayne stalked past them with an arrogant smile on his face. He felt the animosity in the eyes of the officer, but he did not pause.

Moments later he was inside the building.

At this hour the corridors were empty. Shayne heard voices, and at the far end of the hall near the elevators there was another guard post, but where he stood just inside the door he was alone. The building directory told him that The State Committee Of Liberation Affairs was on the fifth floor, the Foreign Department was in Room 542. The Russian Unit was on the third floor.

Shayne found the stairs and started up. At the third floor he

heard Russian voices, but his luck held and he reached the fifth floor without trouble. He emerged into the darkened corridor. He had hoped that perhaps Del Gardo could have been working late, and he had been afraid that someone else might be working late. But the offices were all dark, the guard post at the elevators deserted.

He found Room 542 and slipped inside. The office was not large and was dark in the night. Three doors opened off it to the rear. His pencil thin flash cut a sliver of light. He quickly found the door marked in Spanish, *DEPUTY CHIEF, Luis Del Gardo*. This office was locked. He took out his special ring of keys. The fifth key opened the door. He stepped inside and let the door lock behind him.

Shayne stood in the simple, austere office and slowly looked it over. There was a desk, two straight chairs, a long wooden bench, and a straight-backed wooden desk chair. On the walls there were two pictures: Karl Marx and Fidel Castro. Shayne looked for a long time at the framed picture of the massively bearded Marx.

Then he saw the single closet. He looked at his watch. It was twenty minutes before one A.M. The office probably opened in the morning at eight. Revolutionary governments had a way of being spartan, and a deputy chief would

probably arrive before his workers. The door was locked, and the long bench was inviting.

But some assistant might have a key, and Shayne still did not know if this Del Gardo was his old friend Luis.

With a sigh, Shayne turned to the closet. He opened the door and surveyed it. A clothes closet and there was room for him. He stepped inside and sat down on the floor, his back against the wall. He left the door open an inch, held his silenced automatic in his hand, and fell asleep.

The turn of the key in the lock awakened him.

Alert, Mike Shayne looked at his watch: 7:30. There was a grey light in the crack of the closet door. He released the safety on his automatic and put his eye to the opening.

A slim, very pretty young woman was bent over the desk. Her hands arranged a stack of papers. She took an appointment book from the desk and laid it open on the top, placed a row of pens on the desk beside the appointment book.

She surveyed her work and turned to leave.

Just as she reached the door, it opened and a man came into the office. A small, slender man with a thin, ascetic face behind a Van Dyke beard. The man crossed the office with the quick grace of a cat.

"*Buenas Dias, El Capitan,*" the pretty girl said.

The small man nodded without speaking, and the girl left. Mike Shayne pushed open the closet door and stepped out. His automatic was still in his hand, and he still wore the Russian uniform. The small man heard him, looked up, and froze.

"Hello, Luis," Shayne said.

His voice was almost a croak. It was the first time he had spoken to anyone but the Russian soldier since the roadblock so long ago.

VII

LUIS DEL GARDÓ stared at Mike Shayne, at the automatic and the Russian uniform. For a long moment the small, bearded former detective seemed paralyzed, his hand hovering over a button on his desk. Then he blinked and suddenly covered his mouth with his hand to indicate silence.

Del Gardó moved quickly across the office to the door. The little man locked the door, turned, and recrossed the office to his desk. He leaned down and switched off a small tape recorder in a desk drawer. Then he flicked on his intercom and spoke sharply in Spanish.

Mike Shayne grasped enough Spanish to know that Del Gardó had told his secretary he was not to be disturbed.

Shayne smiled at his old friend and began to speak. Del Gardó shook his head sharply, covering his mouth again. The small former detective crossed to the portrait of Castro and lifted it.

Mike Shayne saw the microphone. Del Gardó replaced the portrait, and again crossed the office to a file cabinet. He opened the cabinet and Shayne saw a short-wave radio. Del Gardó turned it on and the office was filled with the noise of rapid Spanish.

Suddenly, Del Gardó smiled, his thin face split in a wide, happy grin. He spoke softly. "So you made it, Mike! You old monster, I knew I could count on you."

"I got the message. Pretty clever, Luis," Shayne said, smiling.

Del Gardó became serious and nodded. "I have to play it very cozy, Mike. You understand? A hint of suspicion and I'm no use to anyone. That's when I thought about you. I knew that only you would understand that message. When my man got shot, I guessed you'd come yourself."

Del Gardó looked at Shayne. The redhead watched his old friend. Luis had changed. There was something tense about the small deputy chief. But that could be the present dangerous situation. Still, there was something—

Del Gardó stared straight at Shayne. "Thanks, Mike," the small man said. "Thanks for com-



ing. It must have been no bed of roses. I know our police."

"A lot of people got killed, Luis," Shayne said slowly. "But I'm here."

Del Gardo nodded. "You always were good, Mike. Clever. I remember our cases."

"Lucky, Luis. Very lucky," Shayne said.

"A spy needs that, too. And a

little fast thinking, eh? That uniform was quite an idea."

"So was that message and that film," Shayne said. He looked at his old friend. "What's the story, Luis?"

Del Gardo shrugged and began to stroke his beard. He seemed to become aware of the beard as he touched it.

"A nice beard, isn't it? That's the trademark, Mike. You should have seen it at the beginning; wild, luxuriant, honest. Now it's trimmed, disciplined, and not very honest." Del Gardo looked at Shayne. "You understand? I'm a Cuban, Mike, a good one. I wanted our country free and on its own—free of everyone, even Uncle Sam. I fought with Fidel. Then we won and *they* came." Del Gardo pointed at the Russian uniform Shayne wore.

"I still trusted Fidel," Del Gardo went on, "but I wanted us as free as I always did. So I thought I could stay in this job and fight them. I thought I could for quite a while, Mike. Now I don't. Now I have to do more. I want Cuba free, even if it means the end of Fidel. Even if it means that I have to be a spy and a traitor."

There was a silence. Mike Shayne studied his old friend. Luis had told a story he had heard many times before from refugees in Miami. The Florida city was full of Cubans who had once been with Fidel. But none of them had

held posts like Luis Del Gardo, and none of them had held such posts so long. Luis would be quite a catch for the CIA.

"All right, Luis," Shayne said. "How do we get the film, and ourselves, out of here? Most of my contacts are dead."

"Our police are efficient," Del Gardo said bitterly.

"I got in," Shayne said. "Now we'll get out—with that film."

Del Gardo blinked. "We? No, Mike, not we. I stay here. Do you think I set this up for a one-shot deal? No, what I want is to set up a system. You found me, you can take a setup back with the film. We'll work out a whole system of contact and couriers. As long as I can last, I'll feed your government a great deal!"

Shayne tugged on his left ear. "You'll stay here? Isn't that stupid? You must have information in your head. You could fight for Cuba from the States. A man who was as high as you would be a powerful voice against what's going on down here."

Del Gardo smiled bitterly. "A voice? Yes. But we need more than words. You and I, we know crooks and criminals, Mike. Words don't stop them. No, here I can really hurt them, and I will! We'll set up a whole system at my place tonight. I'll give you the address. You be there tonight right after dark."

"Your place?"

"You don't think I've got the rest of that film here? Hell, Mike, they don't really trust anyone. I wouldn't keep it here. I never know when the secret police might search."

"Is your place safer for the film?"

Del Gardo nodded. "You're learning about being a spy, I see. No, Mike, I don't actually have it in my house. But it will be there when you come tonight."

Del Gardo stood up. "Now we have to get you out of here. If I stay alone much longer some of the police spies outside will get suspicious. But we've got some problems about getting you out. You can't wear that uniform out."

"And they think you're alone, Luis. Maybe we better wait until I can sneak out with some group," Shayne said.

Del Gardo smiled. "Don't worry about that. The closet over there has a secret door to the men's room. I chose this office because of that. I remembered that door from the time when this place was the old Trocadero. No, we can get you out of the office. It's the building that's the problem."

"I got in," Shayne said. "I'll take a chance in the uniform. Your guards are impressed by the uniform."

"Usually, but not now. They're looking for the murderer of two Russian soldiers, Mike."

Shayne tugged on his ear.

"They found the bodies? And identified them? That was quick work."

"Early this morning," Del Gardo said. "No, I'll have to give you a pass out. It's risky, but I've got a few special passes I keep for such emergencies. The pass will look as though you came in last night and worked all night. I'll countersign it. That'll get you out."

Shayne shook his head. "No good, Luis. My papers say I'm Sam Cabrillo, Yankee Communist, but they know those papers are phony." He told Del Gardo the events of the day before. "So they know more or less what I look like, too."

Del Gardo swore. "They killed them all? You were very lucky, Mike. That Cota must have sacrificed the people there at Number twelve to convince the police he was telling all he knew. Even our police wouldn't expect that."

"It looks that way," Shayne said.

"There's no other explanation. They would have been waiting for you otherwise. That was awfully close, Mike, believe me. And I'd say that they suspect something. We have to get you out fast."

"You can't risk my being caught with a pass from you, Luis," Shayne said. "That would blow the whole thing."

Del Gardo nodded slowly where he stood. The radio was still babbling loudly in Spanish. Del Gardo

paced the floor. The bearded Cuban's eyes narrowed into slits as he thought. Finally he nodded sharply.

"We'll have to risk it. I can give you some papers. Part of my job is preparing special papers for representatives we send to other countries—we call them Liberation Corps, how about that one?" Del Gardo laughed bitterly, and then stopped.

"Anyway," he said, "I can fix up papers. You'll be Max Jones, a Canadian friend working with the Foreign Department of the State Committee. It'll work. Now, we can dye your hair with—No, that won't work."

"Ink? No, it won't work. How about a hat? And we can cut the hair off so they can't see the color," Shayne said.

Del Gardo thought. "It'll have to do. I can tan your face up with some makeup I'll borrow from the girls. You're too pale-faced not to be conspicuous down here. In the closet with you."

Shayne returned to the closet and closed the door. He listened to the noises and voices outside. Luis was talking to his assistant, the pretty girl. Shayne grinned to himself. Trust Luis to get around a girl. The small rooster always was a ladies' man. In a way Luis had not changed at all. The old ban-tam cock would go all the way for you.

And yet something lurked,

whispered, in the back of Shayne's mind. Luis was not *quite* the same, but, then, how could he be? The ex-detective had been through a lot, and perhaps not the least that Fidel Castro would have to answer for some day was the betrayal of the trust of men like Luis.

"Mike? Come on out, and keep it low."

Shayne stepped out. This time Luis wasted no more time on talk. Within a few moments Shayne's hair had been cropped close with a pair of nail scissors, his face tanned with Max Factor, Soviet style, and he stood in his suit, with the Russian uniform hidden far at the back of the closet. Luis supplied a hat. Shayne did not ask where he had got it.

"Okay, Mike, here's your papers. Remember, you're Max Jones. You come from Calgary. You won't have any trouble at the door with this pass, but watch it later. Now, my house is a big, old villa on the eastern edge of town. It used to belong to one of Batista's best killers. My exalted position rates a villa these days. In the beginning we all lived in barracks."

"Well, a villa is an improvement. Don't knock it."

"I preferred the barracks," Del Gardo said. "Anyway, be there at nine o'clock tonight. The address is Seventy-seven Sierra Padre. Don't fail me. And take this pa-

per. It's an address where you can hide until tonight. It's safe. But, Mike—not a word about me or we're dead men."

"I understand you," Shayne said. "You live alone?"

"Yes, Manuela, my wife, died three years ago. But I have servants. I will handle them. Good luck, Mike." And Del Gardo smiled again, a flash of the old days in his eyes. "We'll meet tonight, you old volcano."

"Let's hope so, Luis," Shayne said, and he turned and stepped into the closet.

He closed the door behind him, found the secret latch Luis had shown him and cautiously opened the secret door. The other side was equally black. He stepped through and closed the secret door. He was in the mop closet of the men's room. Again he cautiously opened the door. The men's room was empty. His luck still held.

In the men's room he washed his hands and carefully splashed a few drops of water onto his suit jacket. Then, hands still damp, he walked boldly out into the corridor. A militiaman looked at him, saw the still damp hands, and looked away.

Shayne strode to the elevators. The guard at the elevator looked at his pass, saw the signature of Luis Del Gardo, and waved him on.

Shayne rode down in the elevator with two bearded officers, a

meek-looking clerk, and a Russian officer who got on at the third floor. The clerk and Shayne stared stonily ahead.

Shayne let the soldiers get off first in the lobby, but preceded the clerk. He did not want to be last from the building, nor first.

He walked out into the morning Havana sun and strode straight to the guard post. The officer looked at him, took his pass and papers. The officer studied them for a long minute. Then the officer said something in Spanish to his men, and they laughed. The officer handed Shayne his papers, and filed the pass in a box.

"Proceed, Comrade Canadian," the officer said. "Take the revolution to our poor Northern cousins!"

The guards laughed uproariously again. Shayne did not think the joke had been that good, but he felt a lot safer as he walked away across the wide street and turned left toward the heart of the city. He took out the slip of paper Luis had given him. The address, he recognized, was in a slum section near the docks.

It was one of those chance moments, totally unexpected. The kind of accidental happening the fate of men and empires sometimes turn on.

As Mike Shayne stopped, suddenly and without thinking, to read the address once more and impress it on his memory before



destroying the slip of paper, his eyes happened to stray to a corner of a shop window bright with the morning sun and clear as a mirror.

For one instant he saw absolutely clearly in the window the reflection of a small, thick-set man wearing heavy dark glasses. The man was standing on the sidewalk across the street, about twenty feet behind Shayne. The man had both hands in the pockets of his dark topcoat—a topcoat he wore despite the growing heat of the Havana morning. It was the pose, the entire manner, of a policeman.

Machado Arrellaga!

One chance instant. Mike Shayne's sudden pause without thinking had been an act neither he himself, nor Arrellaga, could have expected. The unthinking glance at the reflecting window. And the small, heavy Cuban agent stood in his topcoat and dark glasses for one instant like a man caught in a spotlight.

Shayne whirled. But no one

stood there by the time he had turned.

The street was empty of all but the early morning people hurrying to work. But Mike Shayne was sure—Machado Arrellaga was tailing him.

VIII

OR COULD HE be wrong? He had never actually seen Arrellaga. All he knew was the description of the wounded courier in Miami. No, he was right. *Always assume the enemy is on to you.* The words of the murdered Rodrigo Cota rang in his ears. And, Arrellaga or not, the man had vanished the moment he knew he had been seen.

Which meant that Arrellaga, if it had been the principal agent, was on to him but did not want to be seen. They were on to him, then, but they had not arrested him, and they did not want him to know they were on to him.

That had to mean that they did not yet know what he was in Cuba to do! There was no other explanation.

They were on to him, but they were *not* on to Luis Del Gardo. No one had yet talked and betrayed Del Gardo.

Shayne tugged hard on his earlobe as he continued his casual walk along the now bustling morning streets of the sunny, beautiful city. But if Arrellaga did not know

about Del Gardo, then how had he managed to be waiting for Shayne to come out of that particular building? His disguise was not good enough to deceive a man who knew him, but Arrellaga must have been waiting!

Then he remembered what Del Gardo had told him. Luis had said that they had found and identified the Russian soldiers early this morning. They would immediately have known where the Russians were quartered. Since Arrellaga understood that some kind of espionage operation was underway, it would have been a logical conclusion that the Russians might have been killed to give someone access to the building, especially since the Russian soldiers had been stripped of their clothes.

This would explain the whole situation. Arrellaga had guessed that *someone* had secretly entered the building, but not where that person had gone inside the building, or what he had wanted there. So Arrellaga waited. And probably not alone. There would be other agents after Shayne, agents whom he did not know and could not recognize.

It also meant that they were narrowing down his mission. They knew now that whatever he was up to had something to do with the one particular office building and the agencies inside it!

That put Luis Del Gardo in

sharper danger. They would have to move fast. Maybe Luis would have to change his mind about staying in Havana. And somehow Mike Shayne would have to lose Arrellaga, and anyone else, before he met Luis, or even before he went to the 'safe' place to lay low until the night.

Before he could find a safe place, he would have to make sure that he himself was safe to go anywhere without betraying more people. As he walked casually in the sunlight, he began to go over in his mind what he remembered of the city of Havana.

The address was in a slum area near the harbor. Much had probably changed; there was great activity there these days. He could probably lose himself near the harbor, but he would have to lose his shadowers in some other area.

He must lose them somewhere other than the harbor area, yet not so far away that he would run the risk of being picked up again before he got to the harbor.

Losing a tail was not a skill he had to learn. At that little maneuver Shayne could teach the spies a few tricks. He remembered an elegant area of big houses where the rich of Batista's era had lived. The big houses must still be there and also the concrete viaduct that drained the rain from the high hills down to the edge of the sea.

Shayne hailed a passing taxi. The driver showed a certain inter-

est in the address, and looked hard at him. Shayne guessed that the area, like the location where Luis now lived, probably now housed many government officials. He took the chance.

"You speak English?" Shayne snapped.

The driver jumped. "*Si*, yes, I speak English. I have been a taxi driver for many years, *senor*."

"Good. I represent the Canadian Party, as you see," Shayne said, and presented his papers in front of the driver's eyes.

"I see, yes," the driver said, a certain wariness in his voice.

"Good. You are, of course, aware that the Yankees have spies in Havana? I go to visit—it does not matter who, but he is of importance. It is not good for me to be seen there. I am being followed. I will need your help. *Si?*"

The driver paled. "I am just a poor taxi driver, *senor*, I do not know—"

"That is all you have to be. After I get out, you will drive down to the coast road and wait near the old viaduct. I will meet you there, and you will drive me back into the city. You understand?"

The driver was still afraid, but he nodded. "Yes, *si*."

Shayne sat back with a faint smile. The driver was afraid, but even more afraid of disobeying an order. There were certain advantages to a police state for the enemy! The driver could not risk dis-

obeying. Shayne said nothing more until they had reached the area of big, scattered houses.

The streets were wide here, and the grounds of the houses large and open. He directed the driver up to the top of the hill. He looked behind and smiled. A taxi cab and two cars were moving along slowly behind him. They were having great difficulty trying to look like casual traffic. The openness of the area on the hill made it all pretty obvious.

But Shayne's smile was grim. It would be a matter of close timing between himself and his tailers. Soon they would realize that they had been discovered, and that he had brought them out here to lose them. When they did, they would probably move in to catch him, even though he had not led them to the place where they hoped he would.

He leaned forward. "Stop here, driver. Don't forget—go down to the coast road at the viaduct and wait. I will pay you when we return to Havana."

The driver nodded. Shayne stepped out of the car. The driver sped off in the same direction, and Shayne began to walk up the driveway leading to the nearest house. He reached the house, and turned sharply to go around it. Once he was out of sight of his pursuers, he began to sprint.

He ran across a large open lawn and into some heavy bushes be-

hind the next estate. Only then did he stop and look back.

Two men had just come around the corner of the first house on the dead run. Neither of them was Arrellaga. They stopped and stared when they could not see him.

Shayne watched them. The others would be in the cars cruising the streets. They would box him in—which was exactly what he wanted. The viaduct drain was directly ahead at the top of the hill. He would not have to cross a road.

He turned and moved silently and unseen through the bushes, across another lawn, and up a small rise to the viaduct opening. It led at a steep angle to the beach far below, where the sea was breaking white against sand and rocks.

He lowered himself into the great concrete pipe and began to slide down. The angle was sharp, but by gripping the two walls, at a corner where the two sides joined, with both his hands and feet, he could brace and slow his descent.

The rough concrete scraped at his hands as he slid down, and he left a good part of the leather of his shoes rubbed off on the pipe. But in a few minutes he was down at the outlet and standing on the beach.

Above he heard angry shouts. He grinned. His pursuers had

found the giant pipe and come to the correct conclusion. They would be down soon. He climbed up from the beach to the old coast road. The taxi driver was there. The driver was smoking and reading his newspaper. When he saw Shayne his small eyes narrowed suspiciously.

Shayne had expected this. He had told the driver he was going to visit some official, and he had not had time to visit anyone. The driver was no fool.

Shayne held his automatic and smiled at the driver. "Out, now!"

The driver got out, his hands up.

"Thanks," Shayne said. "Now, I'm going to borrow your taxi. I suggest you don't wait around here. Some people are coming who will want to know how come you were working with me. They won't believe what you tell them. I suggest you vanish."

The driver stared his hatred, and then nodded. He was, perhaps, a patriot, but he was not a fool. He turned and began to run. In a few moments he would be out of sight.

Shayne climbed into the taxi and roared away down the old road. He was all but out of sight when he saw, in the rear mirror, three men come up from the beach to the road.

A half an hour later Shayne abandoned the taxi in a alley near a cabaret he knew from the old

days. It was a sailor's dive near the harbor. He left the taxi and entered the bar. It was more than probable that his pursuers had radioed their comrades to look for a taxi.

He was fairly sure he had lost all immediate pursuit, but he intended to be absolutely sure.

At the bar he ordered a Bacardi cocktail, sipped it, and then walked to the men's room. Inside he locked the door and climbed up to the window he knew was there. He went through the narrow window and came out into another alley. He turned right and sprinted toward a ramshackle building at the far end.

He went into this building, straight to the rear. Below was the water of the harbor. He lowered himself out a window and dropped the fifteen feet into the water. He began to swim silently among the pilings which supported the buildings.

Fifteen minutes later anyone who had been there to notice would have seen a big, redheaded man emerge from another waterfront warehouse and walk casually away down a narrow street. They would have seen that he dripped water, his clothes sodden. But there was no one to see.

Ten minutes after that, Shayne stepped up to a half-hidden door inside a narrow archway near the harbor. A small, dark woman opened the door. Shayne gave the

password. The woman stepped back and Shayne walked in. The door closed behind him.

He stood in pitch darkness. He felt the woman's hand and was led down a long, very narrow corridor. The woman knocked: four short, a long, two short. A door opened. Shayne went through. The door closed. Still in the dark Shayne waited. Suddenly a curtain was drawn back in front of him, and he stepped out into a large, dim, brick-walled room.

He knew at once that he was in one of the old, half-forgotten, fortress rooms once used by ancient pirates. Such forgotten hideaways existed all under the old city. He saw four men sitting against the damp old walls. And then he saw a fifth man who stood up and walked toward him.

"Hello, Shayne. I was afraid they'd done for you, too."

Beneath his shock of white hair, Agent Saunders smiled at Shayne.

IX

ALDEN SAUNDERS' impeccable business suit was much the worse for wear. It hung torn and dirty. But the sparkle had not dimmed from the old MI-6 man's eyes. Saunders waved Shayne to a dry spot against the wall. The dark woman vanished. The other four men sat in silence in the dim, vast room beneath the city.

Shayne sat down and took out

a cigarette. He needed a smoke very badly.

Saunders smiled. "Rough go?"

"Rough enough," Shayne said. "Talk to me. That's the worst part of it. No one to talk to. You go so long without hearing your own voice."

Saunders took a cigarette and nodded toward the four silent men. Shayne held out the package. Each of the four men came to take a cigarette, nodded a slow thanks, and returned to sit against the ancient walls. They sat with the cigarettes dangling from their lips, smoke curling slowly upward, their hands at their sides, their eyes closed.

"They haven't slept in two days," Saunders said. "They're waiting for orders on a retaliation raid. They had friends at Number Twelve."

Shayne looked at the men as he drew deeply on his cigarette.

"You're learning fast," Saunders said. "Before this is over you'll be trained. Too bad we'll lose you then."

"You'll lose me. I don't have the stomach," Shayne said, and he told Saunders about the killing of the Russians.

"So that was you. I thought it might be. That's why I came here. I guessed if you got to Del Gardo he might send you here. This is the only cell he deals with."

"You heard about the Russians?"

Saunders nodded. "Felicia there, the girl who let you in, works for the secret police. She's a char woman—scrub woman to you. They identified those dead soldiers about five o'clock this morning. Felicia was still scrubbing the floor. They never notice her, the arrogant fools."

"Well, I'm damned glad to find you again. I was wondering how I could get out of this damned country," Shayne said.

"You almost didn't, old chap," Saunders said grimly. "I almost walked into Number Twelve myself."

"You were there?" Shayne said.

Saunders nodded. Even the trained MI-6 man looked a little grey as he talked about what he had seen.

"I was making a cautious approach on foot when I saw the police move in. They had to have been tipped off. They sneaked up very quiet. It was over in minutes. They just stood at the windows in the patio and riddled the place. Those poor beggars never fired a shot.

"Then they marched up Cota and that underground man I sent with you. Arrellaga was with them. They took Cota and the Cuban into the back, and I heard the shots. There was nothing I could do. I had to get away before they decided to search the whole area. Poor old Cota."

"You think Cota told them?" Shayne asked grimly.

"No, Cota didn't know about Number Twelve. We always work that way. Number Twelve was my baby. No, it had to be that peasant. I suppose he decided it was Number Twelve or you. That's not a choice I would like to have had to make. They were his friends."

"You'd have made the choice," Shayne said. "I guess I'm the mission."

Saunders nodded again. "You are, and we're going to get you out. They killed too many this trip, but we'll get our results for it! You contacted Luis Del Gardo? He was the right man?"

Shayne nodded and detailed the events of the morning. Saunders listened carefully. The MI-6 man frowned when Shayne got to the part about waiting until nine o'clock. Saunders frowned even deeper when Shayne told about Arrellaga spotting him coming out of the old Trocadero Building.

"It might be too risky for Luis to stay now," Shayne said.

"Perhaps, Shayne. But we may have to risk it. God, man, to have a source as high as Del Gardo! The value is incalculable! No, we'll have to leave him here."

"No matter how dangerous to him?"

"We've lost a lot of men, Shayne. One traitor isn't going to make me cry," Saunders said.

"He's my friend, Saunders."

"And Cota was mine," Saunders said. "We'll leave Del Gar-do. But we'll get you and that film out. Nine o'clock, you say? It'll take him time to work out a method whereby we can keep in touch with him. Say a half an hour. All right. His place is at the eastern edge of the city. I'll be there with a jeep at nine-thirty. I'll park about a quarter of a mile to the east, off the road. Look for a jack handle lying in the road. Got it?"

Shayne nodded. "Got it."

"I'll wait exactly forty-five minutes."

"If I'm late?"

"Make your way east to a mile beyond the spot where the police stopped you the other day. I'll have someone there all night. Use the password, *Balaclava*. That's a hard one for Spanish speakers."

"Check," Shayne said.

"Now you better get some sleep. You haven't had much, and tonight is likely to be longer than last night."

"You?" Shayne said.

"I have to get things moving," Saunders said simply. "You'll be safe here."

Shayne nodded and leaned back against the wall. He lit another cigarette and let the smoke trickle from his nose. Now, relaxed for the first time in days, every bone and muscle in his body ached. The tension drained away for the moment, his body let go and the

weariness rolled over him like a tidal wave. He closed his eyes, but everything began to swim and he felt sick. He opened his eyes again and stared around the dim and silent room.

Saunders had already vanished somewhere. One of the four men was also gone. The other three seemed to have never moved, not for years. They sat against the ancient stone walls like ghosts of long forgotten pirates of the Spanish Main. Men who, like those vanished pirates, had been driven to the end, the hope of their nation.

Shayne smoked, his body aching, and watched the motionless men. They were the hope, but they would all be dead before that hope came true. They would undoubtedly be sacrificed soon, soldiers who fell in secret battle, nameless and unsung. But men like this, and men like the people of Number 12, had to die so that those who came after could live.

Men like Cota had to die, and the rest had to live in hidden holes torn from the earth, with the beautiful sky and sun of Cuba only a few feet above, yet millions of miles away. It was insane. There, only a few yards away, was beautiful Havana. And here patriots sat like rats in a dim stone dungeon. Insane! Sometimes Mike Shayne could not help wondering if everyone wasn't insane, both sides. The one hiding, the other



never enjoying the beauty of the blue sky and sea.

A soft hand touched his shoulder lightly. Shayne jerked awake. The pretty, dark woman stood over him. She smiled and pointed to his watch.

Seven o'clock! He had slept for many hours.

Shayne rubbed his eyes and looked around the dim room. Nothing had changed, except that another man had gone. There was no less, and no more, light. This room was timeless. The woman

touched him again. She held a plate of food. Hot food, meat and vegetables of some kind Shayne did not recognize. He did not ask. It was the first hot meal in a long time.

After he had eaten, the woman brought a tin basin of water and he washed his face. The lukewarm water was as good as anything he had felt since he had come to this treacherous island. He was refreshed, and as ready as he would ever be. He stood up, checked his automatic and his supply of bul-

lets, and started for the curtain that covered the door.

The woman let him out and closed the curtain and the first door behind him. He went down the long tunnel corridor and came to the outside door. The small woman checked the street through a hidden peephole. Then she touched him. The next moment he stood on the street in the first dark of night, a faint purple glow still low to the west.

It was night. It was time to finish his job.

Shayne began to walk cautiously through the great city.

X

MIKE SHAYNE reached the house at 77 Sierra Padre ten minutes before he was due to arrive. He crouched low in a thick growth of palms and tropical bushes across the street from the house. It was a large house, as Luis Del Gardo had said, only a few hundred feet off the highway toward Santiago and the east.

The house was dark and quiet, with lights in only one front room and in the rear where the kitchen would be. There was good cover all the way up to the house—once he got across the street. The danger was the street.

He was sure he had lost Arrellaga and his other pursuers, but there was no way to be sure that Arrellaga was not shadowing Luis

also. It was unlikely, since there appeared to be no activity around the house, but Shayne had learned to take nothing at all for granted. There had been no activity around Number 12 Plaza De Madre, either.

Shayne looked at his watch in the dark night. It was nine o'clock. The street in either direction was silent and empty. Shayne took a deep breath and started across the street. He crossed swiftly but without running. In the center of the open street he felt as naked as he had ever felt in his life. It wasn't a good feeling.

Then he reached the cover of the shadowy trees and bushes on the other side. He slowly let his breath out and began to creep toward the lighted front windows of the house.

"*Senor!*"

The voice came from his left. Mike Shayne whirled, his automatic in his hand, out, the safety flicked off. He whirled and went down at the same instant.

The voice had come from the bushes to his left. A woman's voice. She came out into the faint light beneath the trees. In the moment, irrelevantly, he saw that she was pretty. Young and pretty and unarmed.

"Mr. Shayne? You must—"

She spoke English, and she knew his name. She took one more step toward where he lay on the ground. It was her last step.

Four shots ripped the night behind her.

She was hurled forward with a single scream and sprawled face down on the dark ground.

In the bushes behind the woman footsteps ran away.

Mike Shayne waited.

Nothing else happened.

Shayne jumped up cautiously and moved swiftly to the woman. She was dead. Shot four times in the back and head. Shayne turned her over. Her lifeless eyes stared up with the surprise of sudden death.

Shayne stared at her face. He knew the face from somewhere. Then it came to him—she was the assistant he had seen only this morning in the office of Luis Del Gardo!

Sprawled grotesquely in death, her shoe had fallen off, and a small piece of paper lay beside the simple black pump. Shayne picked it up. He knew just enough Spanish to learn from it that the woman had been an anti-Castro agent. And she had been shot. He turned and ran openly for the house.

Now there was little time. Already it could be too late.

Shayne raced up to the front door of the house. Lights had gone on all through the house at the sound of the shots. Shayne burst in the front door and found himself in the center of a milling group of chattering servants. He pushed through them and ran into

the room that had been lighted all along.

Luis Del Gardo stood in the room. The small, bearded former detective held a heavy Luger aimed toward the door. Shayne came through. His thin face was pale as death. Luis breathed heavily. Then he saw Shayne and whispered hoarsely, "Mike! I thought you—"

"No, it was your assistant, the girl!"

"Maria!? No. I—" Luis said, his breath still coming in short gasps.

"Luis, she tried—" Shayne began.

Del Gardo swore. "Then they know! She was one of us, Mike. They must be on their way. Quick, Mike, take the film and—"

Shayne tugged hard on his ear as he stood in the bright room of the elegant house. "I don't get it, Luis! Why aren't they here already?"

"Don't you see, Mike? They must be on their way, you don't have much time. One of them must have followed Maria; she was to come with us on my orders! So the man shot her so she couldn't warn us! They'll be here any second, all of them! Take the film and get going now—or we're dead men!"

Mike Shayne nodded and looked at his old friend. "All right, Luis. But you have to come, too. You can't stay here now. They're

on to you for sure if they shot your assistant."

Del Gardo hesitated, his face a picture of the battle between fear and his duty, between a burning desire to stay and the obvious truth of what Shayne had said. Then he nodded slowly.

"Okay, Mike. Of course you're right. I'm useless here now. Come on. The French doors!"

The small ex-detective turned without another word and ran for the French doors that led out into the grounds at the side of the big house. Shayne strode after Luis. Just as they reached the door, Del Gardo turned.

"Arrellaga was a little slow this time, eh?" Luis said.

"Maybe," Shayne said grimly.

Behind the two men, in the doorway to the room they had left, the servants were clustered, still milling and cackling like squawking hens. All but one servant, a tall thin man dressed as a butler. This man was staring after them.

Outside, Del Gardo turned again to Shayne. "You take the film, Mike. Just in case. You have our escape set up?"

Mike Shayne took the tiny roll of microfilm and nodded. "Come on," he snapped.

At a dead run he led the small ex-detective through the trees and bushes in front of the big houses here on the eastern edge of the Cuban metropolis. Breathless,

with pistols ready, they ran parallel to the road that led to the east.

Every second Shayne expected to hear the sudden roar of motors, the shots in the night that would show their pursuit. But nothing happened. The two men ran on alone in the silent night. They were nearing the place where Saunders should be waiting.

Shayne held up his hand for Del Gardo to stop running. "Take it slow now, Luis. Slow and quiet."

Del Gardo nodded, the Luger tight in his small hand.

Then, in the distance, Shayne heard it—the sound of sirens and motors roaring through the night. The enemy had abandoned the cloak and dagger stuff. The sirens wailed loud and clear. Now it was an open chase.

Shayne led Del Gardo slowly forward. He moved close to the edge of the road in the dark night. The jack handle lay in the road. Shayne stepped cautiously forward.

"Saunders?"

The old MI-6 man stepped out into the road. Two shadowy figures lurked behind him.

"Here, Shayne. You brought Del Gardo? Damn, I told you he would be more useful to us in Havana!"

"Not now," Shayne said grimly. "Listen."

Saunders listened. The sirens filled the night, coming closer and

closer without pause. Saunders swore softly. The old man moved with incredible speed, his white hair flashing in the dark.

"Quick," Saunders said. "Del Gardo in the back. Shayne in front."

The jeep appeared on the road. The driver was one of the men from the dim brick room beneath the city. They piled in, five men in one jeep, and the vehicle roared away in the night, its lights out. Shayne hung on grimly as the driver sped down the road in the pitch dark, the sirens behind growing closer.

The jeep raced on through the night, careening around the sharp curves as the highway curved to run close to the sea. The sirens seemed to gain behind them, but slowly.

Saunders cocked his head to listen. "They're not gaining very fast," the MI-6 man said, "but we can't take a chance. We'll need about twenty minutes after we leave the jeep."

Del Gardo spoke quietly in the careening jeep. "Perhaps I should let them take me, Mr. Saunders. It would delay them long enough. The film is what counts."

"Not with you caught, Luis," Shayne said. "If they know what you gave us, they could change the plan. This way they don't know. They might think this whole caper was to just get you out."

"Shayne is right," Saunders said.

"We can't risk it. No, I'll stop them."

Saunders spoke in Spanish to the driver and the second man from the hidden cellar. The jeep screeched to a halt. The two underground fighters got out and vanished into the night with their rifles.

Saunders took the wheel, and the jeep raced off again. "They'll delay them," he said.

Shayne nodded and looked back for a moment. Two more who would probably die for a strip of microfilm.

The jeep tore on through the dark night.

XI

THEY STUMBLED through the thick brush, the sand shifting beneath their feet. Hours ago there had been shooting behind the jeep, and the sirens had stopped. The sirens had not started again. Now, the jeep abandoned, the shadowy forms of the underground unit fanned out to protect against the militia patrols that patrolled the coast. Shayne, Del Gardo and Saunders moved toward the sound of the sea breaking on sand.

They emerged onto the beach. The line of surf glowed white in the night. Saunders took out a small, shielded flashlight and flashed it seaward. Mike Shayne stared, but could see nothing beyond the glow of the surf. Far off

he heard the sound of motors on the road. Their pursuit was coming closer again.

Saunders did not even look around. The old man stood watching the sea.

The shadow appeared in the white edge of the surf. A large, silent shadow that rose up from the sea. Saunders touched Shayne and Del Gardo. They moved toward the shadow.

It was a large rubber raft. Two men guided it into the beach through the surf. They leaped out and held the raft in the water. They did not run it up onto the beach, but stood there with the big raft surging and bucking in the surf, holding it and waiting.

"Go," Saunders said to Shayne and Del Gardo.

Shayne and the little ex-detective went.

"*Gracias*," Saunders said to the leader of the underground unit.

"*De nada*," the leader said. "*Hasta manana*."

Saunders nodded and waded out to the raft where Shayne and Del Gardo were already seated. Saunders climbed in, and the two sailors ran the raft out through the surf. Shayne looked back at the beach. The underground men had already gone. The two sailors jumped in and began to paddle out through the waves.

Shayne could see nothing ahead, and, soon, nothing behind. They seemed to float in a vacuum

in a dark and empty world. Then, from back on the beach, came the sound of voices and of feet running on the sand.

It would be a patrol of militia, too late to do anything, which would be about the only time the enemy had not scored. It was a rough game. But the prize was himself and the film, and so far that had born a charmed life.

The militia unit was much too far off to see the raft in the dark. Ahead, now, Mike Shayne saw the faint outline of the boat. A hazy blue light guided them to it. It was the same boat he had come over on. That trip seemed like months ago now. It was hard to realize that it had been only two days ago. Hands helped him over the side from the bobbing raft. The raft was hauled up and deflated. The boat got underway.

"Cota?" the man at the wheel of the boat said.

"They got him," Saunders said.

"Tough luck," the man at the wheel said.

"That was it," Saunders said.

"My last job. I'm out of it."

"Yeah," the man at the wheel said.

Luis Del Gardo shivered on the deck in the hot night. The small Cuban was soaked to the skin. But that was not what was making him shiver. He seemed to be listening for something. His black eyes studied Alden Saunders.

"You are old for this work, Mr.

Saunders," Del Gardo said. "But very lucky."

"Too old. This was it. I'm going home and bask on the beach at Brighton, where it's cold and grey and ugly. It's home."

"It seems you have earned it," Del Gardo said. "You have also earned my thanks."

"The film is all the thanks, Del Gardo," Saunders said.

"He's earned it all, Luis," Shayne said in the dark on the heaving deck as the disguised fishing boat chugged heavily through the rising sea. "But he won't go home. There won't be any last job, will there, Saunders?"

Alden Saunders did not answer.

Shayne was about to say more when he looked at Del Gardo. The bearded little Cuban was listening. Then Shayne saw that the man on the wheel was listening. Saunders looked up at the dark sky. Shayne heard it himself. A motor, loud.

"Helicopter," the man at the wheel said.

"They have a post not far from here. Arrellaga must have reached them," Luis said. "Can we evade them?"

"Maybe," the man at the wheel said.

Without a word of command, the crew of the disguised boat began to set up a water-cooled fifty-calibre machine-gun on the deck.

The helicopter came closer very fast.

Shayne searched the dark sky

for a sign of it. He could hear it close by, swooping over and across, banking back. A half-seen shape in the night.

The machine gun held its fire, and the boat chugged on over the sea. The half-seen helicopter roared overhead. Then the motor changed in sound and the helicopter roared above, hovered. A dazzling light struck down from the sky and bathed the boat in a blaze of garish light.

A voice shouted in Spanish.

The machine gun on deck began to chatter.

Luis Del Gardo raised his Luger and fired three times. There was a shattering of glass and the searchlight went out. The helicopter sheared off and the boat went on.

"They carry bombs," Del Gardo said. "Gasoline bombs, too."

"Good shooting," the man at the wheel said. "We might not have got them."

"Not in time," Del Gardo said grimly. "They know I am with you now. I think they don't like that, eh, Mike?"

"I expect they'd like you dead," Shayne said.

The sound of the helicopter engine still hovered in the night. But with their light out they would not attack again.

"Just to be sure," the man at the wheel said. "We better move. No more reason for disguise now, eh, Saunders?"

"No," the old MI-6 man said. "The patrol boats will have heard the shooting. They'll be around soon."

The man at the wheel nodded. He bent down and pressed two buttons cleverly hidden under dials on the instrument board. The roar of the two hidden engines shook the night. The boat seemed to leap half out of the water as it surged forward. The white bow wave spread wide in the night.

Its powerful engines fully engaged, the boat tore away in the night, hull shaking under the pounding of the waves and the surge of the engines. The man at the wheel grinned, his white teeth showing, as he held hard to the wheel and his hair streamed out in the wind.

Saunders sat down on the deck, with his back to the bulkhead. "Sit down. It's going to be bumpy, but we'll make better time than when we came out. We can smoke. They won't catch us now."

Shayne nodded and sat down out of the tearing wind. The boat was moving like a PT boat, but it had neither the shelter nor the strength. The wind ripped, and the hull shook and shivered in the waves. He lit a cigarette and handed one to Del Gardo. Luis leaned back beside Shayne and blew smoke in a long, slow stream.

"Well, I would have been better in Havana, but it will be good to see Miami again," Del Gardo

said. "Strange. It has been so long. I began it all with such high hopes. Perhaps I will go back someday."

"You'll go back, Luis," Saunders said. "It may take time, but you will go back."

"For that I pray," Del Gardo said.

Shayne tugged slowly on his left earlobe in the dark. His grey eyes had become cold points like steel. He smoked and looked across the spray-drenched open deck.

"You think it's all over?" Shayne said slowly. "Both of you?"

"They won't catch us now, Shayne," Saunders said.

Saunders' white hair gleamed wet from spray as the old MI-6 man turned his head toward Shayne. The redhead watched the old agent. Then he looked at Del Gardo where the small man sat with the spray dripping from his beard in the dark night.

"What do you say, Luis?" Shayne asked quietly.

"We are hidden in the dark, the planes cannot find us easily," Del Gardo said slowly. "We can outrun any patrol boat now. What could they possibly catch us with, Mike?"

"Radios," Shayne said. "They have radio contact."

Saunders and Del Gardo looked at each other as the boat bucked and heaved in the night, showing water down across the open

deck. The old MI-6 agent rubbed his chin.

"They'd be crazy to try in the States, Shayne," Saunders said.

Shayne nodded. "Perhaps, but they will."

There was a silence beneath the heavy roar of the engines and the pounding of the light boat against the waves. Shayne lit a cigarette, cupping it in his big hands against the wind and the flying spray. He smoked it in silence and looked ahead toward where Florida waited.

XII

AT KEY WEST the boat slid silently into its pier under the cover of the darkness. The trip had been much faster coming back, and it was not yet dawn in Florida. A car was waiting for them, with two CIA agents in it. Saunders had contacted them by short wave radio. Shayne gave the film to the chief CIA man.

Shayne and the others said good-bye to the crew of the boat, and walked to the waiting car. The car drove off toward the Causeway to the mainland and Miami. A State Police car appeared from a side street and assumed position behind the car. Two motorcycle troopers took position in front. The cortege roared away toward Miami.

In the back seat of the CIA car Mike Shayne sat between Alden

Saunders and Luis Del Gardo. The old MI-6 man seemed to be lost in his own thoughts, perhaps seeing the bleak, grey coast of England that was so different from this semi-tropical paradise.

Shayne watched the passing sea and the sand islands of the Keys. A grin played over his gaunt face. Florida had never looked so good. For the first time in three days he felt safe, or almost safe. It was a good feeling, a feeling no man should ever have to live without.

A man who cannot feel, for most of his brief life, safe, is not a man, not a human being. His humanity has been taken from him; he is no more than a beast in the jungle.

But there was a jungle, and Shayne sat alert. The sea shone on either side of the Causeway. Dawn broke as they left Key Largo behind. A dawn that glowed grey, and then white, and finally seemed to leap up from the sea to the east with the great ball of the sun. But Mike Shayne was waiting.

It happened just as they crossed one of the Causeway bridges over the open water.

A black car coming in the opposite direction let the motorcycle cops pass and then suddenly swerved across the highway directly in the path of the oncoming CIA car. Doors opened on the swerved car, and men tumbled out into the roadway, firing as they fell.

It was a suicide mission.

The CIA car screeched to a halt. The CIA agents swerved the car across the road and fell out, rolling behind and under the car. Saunders, Shayne and Del Gardo dived for the cover of the car. Everyone had their guns out and firing.

The motorcycle troopers lay up ahead in the road catching the attackers in a cross fire.

The State Police car surged to a stop behind the CIA car, the troopers came out with their sub-machine guns and firing.

Already two of the attackers lay dead on the Causeway.

One of the CIA men grunted and fell over, hit in the leg.

The troopers poured a withering fire into the attackers' car. Now there was only one attacker left firing. Shayne lay near the rear of the CIA car, close to the edge of the Causeway above the dark water that ripped fast beneath the bridge. He peered around and aimed at the last man.

"Behind us!" Saunders suddenly cried. "They've got men behind us!"

Shayne started to whirl. A bullet ripped into the car just above his head.

Behind Mike Shayne there was heavy firing from the troopers.

"They got him," someone cried.

A bullet slammed into Shayne's shoulder. Red pain stabbed through his body, and the force of

the shot hurled him against the bridge railing. But his mind was clear. Without a second of hesitation, Shayne went over the edge and fell down into the swirling water.

Even as he hit the water he was aware of a silence above. The firing had stopped.

Beneath the water, Shayne swam. His shoulder stabbed and burned. Gritting his teeth, his gaunt jaw set in pain, he swam under the surface. The current pulled him outward. With a surge of effort, Shayne caught onto the pilings beneath the road.

His jaw clamped in pain, he climbed up into the girders beneath the road. There, unseen, he hung on. On the surface of the water, the current rushing beneath the Causeway, his hat floated out into the morning sun and drifted swiftly away.

On the roadway above someone cried out. "He's gone!"

"The film!" Saunders said sharply. "He had the film!"

One of the CIA men spoke. "The film's safe. He gave it to me."

There was a long silence as Shayne sensed they were all looking down and out, searching the dark, rushing water. Then Saunders spoke again.

"He must have sensed they would try for him. He said they would try again, and he was the prime target."

"Poor Mike," Luis Del Gardo said sadly above. "I blame myself! It has all gone wrong."

Saunders voice was tired and very old. "No, we have the film. That was the mission. They may try still again. We better go on."

Luis Del Gardo said desperately, "But—we can't leave him like this! The man may be drowning down there, helpless, trying to call us. We can't let Mike die, after all he did for us."

"Cota died," Saunders said grimly. "So did a lot of other good men. All to save a little roll of microfilm." His eyes were uncompromising. "Mike Shayne was a brave man. But he'd be the first to tell you what I'm telling you now, Luis. In this business the mission comes first, human life a very poor second. Get going, man! We can't risk staying here. This place has death in every corner!"

There was another silence, and then the sound of feet walking away.

"Leave one of your men here, Lieutenant," one of the CIA men said. "We'll radio the Coast Guard; they'll want to see just where it happened. That current is damned strong; the body may be half a mile away by now."

Beneath the Causeway Mike Shayne hung on. His shoulder throbbed with pain. The shoulder seemed ready to tear away from his body. He was feeling faint, his grip slipping. He shook his head

angrily and clung grimly to the beams over the rushing water.

Above his head car doors closed, motors started, and the cars drove off. There was a long silence. Above a single man seemed to be leaning against the railing looking out.

Mike Shayne waited.

At last nothing moved above but the slow footsteps of the one man.

Shayne climbed slowly up. As his head came above the roadway, he called out: "Trooper!"

His voice was a cracked, harsh croak. The state trooper whirled. He stared at the apparition he saw. Shayne's shock of red hair dripping water, the bloody pulp of the redhead's shoulder, the contorted, wet face. Then the trooper ran to help him up and over the railing to the roadway.

Shayne slumped onto the roadway. Passing cars slowed as their drivers stared at the Cuban car and the bodies in the road. They stared at Shayne and the trooper bending over him.

"Mr. Shayne! We were sure—"

Shayne nodded. "Yeah. I hung on down there. Get me up."

"You're hurt bad. Better stay put until I get a doc."

"No," Shayne insisted. "Get me up. On your cycle. Into Miami."

The trooper stared. "You can't ride with that shoulder!"

"I'll ride," Shayne said grimly. "It's not as bad as it looks. Get me

up and onto that cycle. We'll find a doctor on the way. Come on. Now!"

Shayne clung to the trooper as the motorcycle roared along the Causeway. They reached the mainland, and soon after found a doctor. An hour later, the bullet out and in Mike Shayne's pocket, his wound treated and bandaged with his left arm strapped tight across his chest, they roared away toward Miami.

Shayne's red hair streamed out in the wind as he clung hatless to the trooper. His shoulder still pounded, but the doctor had given him a shot for the pain, and now he rode with his jaw grim and set. He wanted to reach Miami and the office of the CIA.

They were all gathered around the desk of Case Officer Morton Cummings. Davis, the MI-6 area chief, and Will Gentry were there with the others. They were examining the film. Davis and Cummings seemed excited. They barely looked up as Shayne strode in with the trooper.

Gentry raised his eyes, and so did Alden Saunders and Luis Del Gardo. The Miami Chief of Police first seemed stunned, incredulous, and then Shayne's old friend broke out in a wide smile.

"Mike! You're not dead!" Gentry cried.

"Not quite," Shayne said drily.

Saunders and Del Gardo seemed equally stunned. Saunders narrowed his eyes and began to

rub his old face. Del Gardo blinked once, twice; then his small, bearded face broke into a grin as wide as Will Gentry's.

Cummings and Davis were now looking at Shayne. The case officer for the CIA beamed at him.

"Glad you're okay, Shayne. You did a fine job," Cummings said.

Shayne tugged on his ear. "And that's what counts, right? The job? You're glad I'm alive, but it really doesn't matter. I'm learning about this espionage. I wonder if it's worth it."

"Damn it, Shayne," Cummings cried, his voice eager, excited. "Do you know what this film is? It's the whole blueprint for a Castro take-over in Honduras! Set for a week from today! It's got all the names, places, agents, secret traitors, everything! We'll be able to plan, and we'll be there and ready!"

Shayne lit a cigarette, snapping the match alight on his thumbnail with his one free hand.

"Honduras, eh?" Shayne said, the cigarette smoke trickling from his nose. "Well, that's the last place I'd wait for a takeover then, especially a week from today."

Cummings opened his mouth—and closed it again.

Davis blinked.

Saunders stared at Mike Shayne, his old eyes gone flat, blank. Luis Del Gardo was as white as snow. The little Cuban

was hunched over, his right shoulder lower than his left. Shayne half smiled at Del Gardo, and shrugged.

"I don't know where the take-over is planned, Cummings, or when," Shayne said softly, "but nothing is going to happen in Honduras. It's all a fake!"

XIII

LISA DEL GARD0 let out a long, slow, harsh breath. The former detective's black eyes seemed to snap in the light.

"You're saying I've been used, Mike? Conned?" Del Gardo said.

Shayne nodded. "The whole thing is a plant to feed us phony information."

"A counter-espionage plant!" Saunders said quietly. "A typical Soviet operation. Classic!"

But Davis and Cummings did not want to see their coup die so simply. The two top agents spoke at once.

"Can you prove this, Shayne?" Davis cried.

"You better prove this, Shayne!" Cummings said.

Shayne shrugged. He let his grey eyes fix on Alden Saunders and Luis Del Gardo. Slowly, he shook his head.

"What is proof in this kind of thing, Cummings? No, I don't have real proof, but I've got evidence. You know, this whole thing was odd right from the start."

Shayne drew deeply on his cigarette. Out of the corner of his eye he watched Alden Saunders. The old man was staring at him hard.

"I'm not saying I spotted it. I didn't. If I had, a lot of men might still be alive. No, it was only later that I started to think. After something happened down there in Havana." And Shayne half-smiled at Saunders and Del Gardo.

"Take that courier who came to me. You explained why Arrellaga didn't get the film from that fishing lure—there wasn't time and maybe Arrellaga didn't know about the film. Fine. That's logical. But tell me this—how do you explain an expert secret agent shooting at a man twice from about ten feet and only hitting leg and shoulder? That would take a very bad shot, wouldn't you say? He didn't want him dead. He wanted him to live to tell me his story."

In the silence everyone in the office looked at everyone else. What Shayne had said was so ridiculously simple it was impossible to attach importance to it. Yet there it was—so transparently simple no one had seen it. Not even Shayne.

"I missed it too," Shayne said. "I missed a lot at first. Take that captain at the roadblock in Havana. I made a mistake; I saluted with the wrong hand. I realized what I had done almost at once. So did that captain, but he was awfully slow to pick it up. And

when he did pick it up, he acted so stupidly I got away!

"When I thought about it, it came to me that the way he acted could be explained simply. He knew all about me, he was not supposed to catch me, but he knew *I knew I had made an error*. See? He was supposed to let me through, but he realized that if he didn't stop me after the mistake, I might get suspicious! You see, *I knew he should catch me!*"

Shayne laughed harshly. "He was in some bind, that captain. If he pretended not to have seen, when I knew he had, he could blow the whole deception. If he caught me, he blew the whole scheme. He did the only thing he could. He gave that underground man time to act, and then he sent his men after the wrong man—all of them! He had to hope I thought him stupid."

Shayne paused and let smoke trickle from his thin lips. His gaunt face was grim. "It worked at first. I still didn't tumble. I'm no expert spy. I don't think I ever would have guessed until they made one bad mistake. Even with it all staring me in the face. I mean, I had an awful lot of luck, didn't I?"

There was an uncomfortable shifting in the office of the CIA Chief. Luis Del Gardo was nodding now, as if it was all coming clear. Alden Saunders spoke in his flat old voice.

"Too much luck, Shayne.

You're right. That massacre at Number Twelve Plaza De Madre—it was impossible they would not lay in wait for you or even me," Saunders said. "Cota didn't know about Number Twelve, so it had to be that underground man who told. I don't think he would have told on his friends and not told on you. If he broke, he would have broken all the way."

Shayne rubbed his aching shoulder. "They went too far. They wanted to make it look good, especially after the roadblock fiasco. They thought I might wonder after the roadblock, so they gave me a massacre to convince me it was all real. But they were too good. If they knew all about Number Twelve, they should have waited for me."

"Especially since just good espionage work would have made them leave some men in case anyone did show up," Saunders said.

"And especially since later on I found out that Arrellaga was on to me anyway!" Shayne said. "No, all down the line I was too lucky, while everyone else was getting killed. It added up to only one thing—they wanted me to get in and get out with the film, but they wanted it to look very hard so it would seem real."

This time the silence was like a great fog lying over the office. Davis and Cummings were no longer smiling or protesting. Will Gentry was chewing on the stump

of his black cigar. Luis Del Gardo was standing as if shocked to his roots. Only Alden Saunders seemed to be really thinking. Saunders looked very old now.

"But, Shayne," Saunders said. "Del Gardo sent you that message. No one else could have sent it, you told us that. So—"

Shayne nodded. "So Luis is behind the whole scheme. Yes, Luis is in on the whole deception. Isn't that right, Luis?"

Del Gardo snapped. "Don't be stupid, Mike! If you're right, someone fooled me, too. Maybe I should have wondered about how I stayed alive after the courier was shot."

Shayne blew smoke and stubbed out his cigarette in an ash-tray on Cummings' desk. He looked at Luis Del Gardo. The bearded former detective met his gaze steadily.

"That was the first thing that began to bother me, Luis. I felt something wrong in your office, something that didn't quite ring true. Partly, you weren't really scared enough, or bitter enough. But what it really was—it hit me later—was something you said about your courier. You said *when* he was shot in Miami, not *if*, or when *something* happened. You *knew* the courier had been shot. How? How did you know what had happened in Miami?"

Del Gardo smiled. "My underground contacts told me."

Shayne shook his head. "No, Luis. Even they didn't know that fast. Only Arrellaga could have told you! But I'll give you the benefit of that doubt. You made a couple of other big mistakes. Those Russian soldiers I killed, you knew they were dead and who they were. You knew before you came into your office, because I heard all that happened in your office.

"Saunders told me those bodies had not been identified until around five that morning, but at a little after seven-thirty you already knew all about them. Luis, you're only Deputy Chief of the Foreign Department of The State Committee Of Liberation Affairs. In short, you're in propaganda and propagation of foreign unrest. It was the *secret police* who found and identified those bodies. But in a little over two hours you knew. You must have had very close connections to the secret police, eh?"

Everyone was looking at Luis Del Gardo now. It was Cummings who said it.

"Too close. Secret police don't call just anyone at five or six in the morning to hand out information," Cummings said.

Del Gardo said nothing this time.

"You were too anxious to stay on in Havana, Luis. You wanted to set up a whole phony information path. You knew we'd jump

at it. But when things got obviously too dangerous, I still had to persuade you to leave. You're a loyal Castro man; you wanted to stay. I should have remembered you don't change sides so easy." The redhead shook his head.

"I always said you were a tough man, Luis," Shayne said. "But you made the one big mistake. It's what started me thinking it out."

"And what was that, Mike?" Del Gardo said quietly.

"Killing that assistant of yours," Shayne said. "Yes, you killed her, Luis. It had to be. She came to tell me something. She didn't go to you; she waited secretly for me! She started to tell me something. She was an underground agent. I guess she was about to tell me you were with the secret police, that she had discovered it was all a counter-espionage plot.

"It was the only thing that made sense. Arrellaga would have had no reason to kill her. What could she tell me about him that I didn't know? If it had been Arrellaga, he would have gotten us all at once. He would have no reason to shoot her and leave me alive. And no good agent would have been there alone, Luis.

"When I ran into the house, you had your gun out, and you were breathing hard. You'd just run in from shooting her. Arrellaga and his men weren't even near. As a matter of fact, the secret police had no intention of be-

ing there. We were to transfer the film and I was to get away. When you had to shoot that girl, you knew you had to whistle-up Arrellaga to make it look good. I figure you gave the high sign to one of your servants, probably that butler. That was why we didn't hear the sirens for a while."

Del Gardo was very pale, but he spoke with fervent sincerity. "Mike, I swear you've got it all wrong! Maybe it is a fake, but I'm not in on it."

Shayne laughed now. "Luis, not only are you in on it, but you guessed long ago that I was beginning to see the truth. I think you knew I would figure it out when you had to kill that girl down there. You're smart, Luis. You always were. But you made a very dumb play when you tried to silence *me*. I guess you felt you had no choice, you guessed I was on to you. And this bullet should be all the proof we need."

Shayne took the bullet from his pocket. It was the bullet the doctor had taken from his shoulder. He tossed it onto the desk in front of Cummings.

"That should be easy to match to Luis' Luger, Cummings," Shayne said. "He shot me in the back. The shooting was over when I was hit."

Luis Del Gardo moved like a snake. The Luger leaped into his hand. But it went no farther. Saunders swung the edge of his

hand. The old MI-6 man caught Del Gardo full across the throat with the expert blow.

Luis Del Gardo collapsed with a squawk like a dying chicken.

XIV

IT WAS ALMOST night again in Miami when Mike Shayne finished his report and stood up. Cummings, Davis and old Saunders sighed wearily like a chorus. Only Will Gentry was looking at Shayne. The Chief chewed on his perennial cigar.

"You took a hell of a chance, Mike. If you thought he had figured it out back in Havana," Gentry said. "He could have killed you any time—when that helicopter attacked your boat, for instance."

Shayne shook his head. "You have to know about spies, Will. I learned the hard way. It's the mission that counts. Nothing else matters to them. Nothing. Right, Saunders?"

"You're learning," Saunders said.

Shayne nodded. "You see, Will, I had the film! If he shot me on the boat, I could have gone overboard. Besides, he had to shoot me when he wouldn't be suspected, or he would have blown the whole deception. So I gave him his chance. I passed the film to the CIA man. Luis knew there would be another attack. He

waited until they attacked. Luckily, I was ready for him."

"You were lucky all along," Gentry said drily.

"Thanks to the enemy," Shayne said grimly. "And thanks to that poor girl down there. If she hadn't come to warn me, and sacrificed her own life, I might never have put all the little hints together. After all, I'm not a spy."

Saunders leaned back in his chair, his white old hair gleaming in the light of the office. "You are now, Shayne. You've learned most of it."

"Maybe I don't want it," Shayne said.

"You've done us a big service, Shayne," Cummings said.

Shayne looked at the CIA case officer. "What? You know nothing more than you did. You don't know what they're going to do."

"We know what they're *not* going to do, Shayne," Davis, the MI-6 principal agent, said. "We can rule out Honduras."

"One country?" Shayne said. "You can rule out one country. For that you paid with eleven dead people on our side, including your own man Cota. Not to mention at least five Cubans, and two Russian soldiers, who probably didn't want to be in Cuba any more than I did. For that you know that there won't be an attempt to take over Honduras next week! Maybe next month, but not next week!"

"It's a start, Shayne," Cummings said.

"We've got Del Gardo," Davis said. "That will hurt them."

But it was Alden Saunders who said it all. The old man said, "We beat them for this week, Shayne. This week, we won."

Shayne nodded as he turned to leave. "Yeah. Mike Shayne was a winning spy—for this week. That's what we won. I wonder if it's worth the price. Especially since you can't even be really sure Honduras isn't the target! It could be a double double-cross."

"It could be," Cummings said. "We just have to use our best guess. We think you're right."

"Tune in next week," Shayne said. And he left.

Mike Shayne went home. He did not sleep well for quite a

while. He had bad dreams, and he woke up at night reaching for his pistol. There was a big announcement about the defection of Luis Del Gardo. Luis was said to be in "protective custody," incommunicado, and the Cubans denied that Luis had defected at all. But they could not produce Luis, and so lost on points.

A week later nothing happened in Honduras. Shayne had guessed right. There was an outbreak in Santo Domingo instead. The United States got there fast. Mike Shayne guessed that his information, his guess, had helped. It did not make him sleep any better. It made him *feel* a little better, but at night he still dreamed and saw all the dead bodies.

The price—it had been heavy and bloody indeed.

IN THE NEXT ISSUE

THE HUNTED ONES

A NEW COMPLETE SHORT NOVEL

by JAMES McKIMMEY

A girl who knew no evil . . . a boy who knew it intimately and too well . . . together, linked by the dreadful secret they shared, they fled into the hostile night, where Death in a hundred forms lay waiting for he who bore the hell brand of no return—Cop Killer!

The Pickup Man

by JACK RITCHIE



*The kidnapping scheme seemed foolproof
in every respect. Actually . . . it was!*

I GOT A COKE from the machine and went back outside again. In the shade of the station, I tilted a chair against the wall next to Pop Demeter.

He filled his pipe slowly. "Starting to cool off," he said. "It's just one hundred in the shade now."

I drank some of the coke and squinted at the desert and the empty road. "Only eight cars today."

Pop nodded. "Business like usual. No run on gas."

A speck appeared on the highway near the horizon.

"Maybe a customer," I said. I looked at my watch. It was five-fifteen.

We watched the car get bigger. "It's not slowing down," Pop said.

The big Buick roared by the station.

Pop drew on his pipe. "I hope he knows it's fifty miles to the next gas station," he said.

I took my time finishing the coke and then got up. "See you sometime tomorrow," I told him.

It was dry-hot inside my car. I rolled down all the windows before I started the motor and pulled out.

After two miles, I stopped beside the sun-whitened skeleton of the wagon beside the road. I got out and walked to the thick clump of cactus behind it.

When I came back with the package, I put it on the front seat of the car.

My speedometer clicked off another seven miles before I turned left up the line of car tracks to my cabin. I carried the box inside and shoved it under my bunk.

I sat down and listened.

Yes. I could hear it. Far up and very faint.

After supper I read some old magazines for a couple of hours and then went to bed.

I slept late the next morning and I'd just finished my first cup of coffee when the door burst open and they poured into the room.

There were about seven or eight in uniform and some who weren't, but they all held guns.

I put up my hands. "What's this all about?"

They lost no time in handcuffing and searching me. One of the cops turned to a big gray-haired man.

"He's clean, Captain Ferguson."

A detective bent down on one knee beside my bunk. "It's under here," he grunted.

"Be careful how you handle it," Ferguson said. "It's probably got his fingerprints on it and every little bit helps. Not that we need much help now."

The detective pulled the package out by the cord and set it on table.

Ferguson seemed in a good humor. "Now I suppose you got some interesting story for this? Like how somebody paid you ten dollars to pick it up and hold it for him until he called for it?"

"No," I said. "I found it beside the road while I was driving home yesterday."

Ferguson grinned. "And I suppose you're going to tell me that you don't know what's in it?"

"I don't," I said.

"Then aren't you even a little bit curious?"

I shrugged. "I figure it fell out of somebody's car. Maybe there'll be something about it in the Hainsville Desert Herald and I'll get a reward."

Ferguson stopped grinning. "We both know what's in that package. Two hundred thousand dollars."

My eyes went to the table. "I'm not saying any more until I know what this is all about."

Ferguson took a deep breath. "All right. I'll tell you what it's all about—just to make it official and

so that you got no complaints for your lawyer. Last week Wendell Peters, a Los Angeles real estate broker, disappeared. The next morning his partner, James McGivern, received a note in the mail informing him that Peters had been kidnapped and was being held for two hundred thousand dollars ransom. McGivern notified the police."

I indicated the box. "And that's the two hundred thousand?"

Ferguson nodded. "Surprised, aren't you?"

I looked around the room. "And all of you saw me pick it up?"

Ferguson smiled. "We didn't. But you were seen just the same."

I raised my cuffed hands and wiped some of the sweat from my forehead. "I didn't see anybody."

"You forgot to look up," Ferguson said. "We had a helicopter over the area. After you picked up the package, the pilot followed your car to this cabin. We kept out of sight, but we had this place surrounded in less than forty-five minutes."

I cleared my throat. "You had this place surrounded in less than forty-five minutes? Then why did you wait until this morning before you broke in?"

"Because in kidnapping cases our first concern is for the safety of the victim. We didn't know whether you had him here or not or what you might do if we tried to get to you. So we decided to play

along with the note you sent to McGivern. And according to that you promised to release Peters at noon today."

I looked at the clock on the shelf. "It's only ten-thirty," I reminded him.

Ferguson smiled again. "It turned out that we didn't have to wait that long after all. This morning McGivern got a note in the mail telling him where to look for Peters. And ten minutes ago we got a message that he'd been found unharmed."

Now he took a notebook out of his pocket.

"What's your name?"

"Fred Masters," I said.

"Occupation?"

"Auto mechanic."

"Where do you work?"

"Pop Demeter's Garage and Station," I said. "About nine miles up the road. I show up there every morning and hang around. Whenever there's any work, I do it."

"But that's not enough for a living, is it?"

"It is if you live in the desert," I said.

I thought they were going to take me to the jail at Hainesville, but instead the line of cars turned toward the coast.

After two hours we turned through the gates of what appeared to be a fairly large estate.

I was taken into the big house and led into what was probably called the library. There were at

least a dozen people in the room, mostly policemen.

Ferguson pushed me toward the man in an easy chair. "Well, Peters, we got him."

Peters looked tired and he needed a shave. He studied me. "About the same height," he said. "but that's all I can say. He always wore a mask and loose clothes."

Somebody handed Peters another drink and he told his story again for the benefit of Captain Ferguson. "I spent the evening with my partner and his wife and left at about eleven-thirty. I'd just finished putting my car in the garage when this masked man stepped out of the darkness. He didn't speak. As a matter of fact I never heard his voice at any time. He just indicated that I should turn around, and then he handcuffed and blindfolded me. He led me to a car and forced me to lie down in the back. He tied my legs and covered me with a blanket."

Peters sipped his drink. "We drove for hours. Or at least it seemed like hours. And then finally he stopped. He removed the rope from my legs and led me, still blindfolded, up a rough path. When he removed the blindfold, I appeared to be in some kind of a tunnel."

A tall, balding man spoke up. "It was one of those abandoned mine shafts in the hills. I got the note with the directions where to

find him in this morning's mail."

"Let's see it, McGivern," Ferguson said.

McGivern handed him a folded sheet and an envelope. "Your men have checked these for fingerprints," he said. "Nothing on the notepaper. There were some prints on the envelope, but they turned out to be the postman's—just like with the others."

Ferguson read the note and then held it in front of me. "I suppose you've never seen this before?" he asked.

I read the typewritten lines.

You will find Peters in the abandoned Maratosa Mine. Shaft marked with pole and handkerchief.

"No," I said. "I've never seen this before."

Ferguson examined the envelope. "Postmarked yesterday noon?" He frowned for a moment and then looked at me. "That was even before the money was dropped off. You must have been pretty certain that nothing would go wrong."

"Could I have a cigarette?" I asked.

Somebody lit one for me and Peters went on with his story. "He handcuffed me to some kind of an iron stanchion. It was set firmly in a huge block of cement and possibly he had made it for just that purpose. When he left me, I tried to get out of the handcuffs. When that failed, I attempted to drag the

cement block, but it was much too heavy to move. I shouted for help, of course, but evidently no one heard me."

"Did he leave you alone there all this time?" Ferguson asked.

Peters shook his head. "No. He came back every night with food and water. According to my watch, it was always about nine o'clock."

Ferguson took a sheet of paper from one of the detectives and let me see it. "And I suppose you never saw this before either?"

I read the note.

I have your parther. You can have him back for two hundred thousand dollars. You have forty-eight hours to get the money. I will send instructions. Do not notify police or Peters will be dead.

"No," I said. "I never saw this before."

He held up another sheet of paper. "Or this?"

I read:

Follow directions exactly. Put money in shoe boxes. Make one package. Wrap in brown paper.

Tomorrow take Highway I-94 west from Hainesville. Drive 12-6 miles. You will find ruin of wagon beside road, right hand side. Put package in clump of cactus behind wagon. 5:30 P.M.

Be alone. If I smell a cop within ten miles, I will kill Peters. Otherwise I will let him go at noon on Thursday.

I took the cigarette out of my

mouth for a few seconds. "Look, if I were going to pick up two hundred thousand dollars in ransom money, wouldn't I wait until night?"

Ferguson shrugged. "You got anxious. You didn't want the money to get sun-burned."

"And wouldn't I be curious about whether the money was really in the package?" I asked. "Wouldn't I at least open it?"

"How do I know what goes through your mind?" Ferguson said irritably.

The handcuffs were beginning to hurt my wrists a little. "This kidnapping," I said. "When did it happen?"

"The fifteenth," Ferguson snapped. "Friday night. But that shouldn't be new to you."

I smiled slowly. "But I was in jail."

Ferguson's eyes narrowed.

"I was in jail," I said again. "Friday, I got drunk and in a fight and the sheriff in Hainesville put me in a cell. It was about suppertime and he kept me there until noon Saturday."

Ferguson's face became expressionless. He turned abruptly and went to the phone.

When he finished, his face was flushed. He talked to the entire room. "The sheriff says that he was in jail Friday night."

Then he glared at me. "Don't tell me that you were just an innocent boob who happened to pick

up the package before the kidnapper could get to it?"

"Yes, sir," I said. "I guess that's what happened. I was driving slow and I happened to see this package sticking out of that clump of cactus."

The room was silent for half a minute and then Peters chuckled. "It looks like the kidnapper spent all his time for nothing. We've still got the money."

He got up, took a small pen-knife from his pocket, and cut the cord around the package. There were six shoe boxes and he opened one of them. He frowned slightly. "Oh, I see. You didn't put any money in the package after all, did you, James?"

James McGivern moved forward and opened the other five shoe boxes. A tic began working on the side of his face. "But I did put the money in these boxes. I swear I did."

Peters stared for a long moment and his eyes became speculative.

I PARKED my car beside the station, got a coke, and joined Pop Demeter outside.

He turned a page of the newspaper. "Nobody seems to know just what happened except that two hundred thousand dollars is missing. And reading between the lines, I get the feeling that Peters thinks his partner pulled a fast one and pocketed all the money himself."

"Well," I said. "You and I know better and I guess we're the only ones."

Pop tapped dottle from his pipe. "First time I ever kidnapped anybody. Don't seem to be much to it. Any hitches on your end of the deal?"

"No," I said. "I made sure the copter couldn't see me before I dug up your package and put the one McGivern left in its place. In that loose sand it didn't take me more than a minute or two to make the switch and smooth things out."

Pop grinned. "When that copter saw you crawl out of the cactus with our special package everybody naturally thought that you had the two hundred thousand and took out after you. Mighty busy on the road for a while. But everything calmed down about sundown and I drove out and dug up the money."

I sipped the coke. "The police probably got a record of the serial numbers of those bills, so we'll just sit on the money for a few years. Or maybe we can shop around careful and find somebody who'll give us fifty cents on the dollar. We got time."

We watched a car moving toward us on the horizon. After ten minutes it slowed down and pulled up beside one of the pumps.

Pop Demeter got off his chair. "Tenth car today. I may get rich yet."

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It was a brutal murder and the suspects were many and various. So the crime class had a field day.



A LIST OF SEVEN

by **ROBERT W. ALEXANDER**

THE TEACHER, Charles Kovac, shocked his criminology class by using the murder of a professor's wife as the subject of his text; employing logic in deduction. It wasn't a hypothetical case for them to bisect unemotionally. Everyone in the class had met the young, attractive victim. Even more ironic, he was the major suspect in the unsolved murder and they knew it. He watched them exchange glances as they read the

mimeographed instruction placed on their desks.

What appeared an object lesson of his mimicked quote, 'facts can be misleading,' was actually presented for a different reason. The victim, at the time of death, was the charming wife of his new friend, Marty Hartwell. Marty and his wife were recent to the college, having moved here from the East only two months ago. When Charles was absent for two



weeks with the flu, Marty had taken over his classes and did a respectable job.

Charles was not surprised that Marty had entertained the criminology class in his home, twice on Friday evenings. Marty knew only a few people and his wife was lonely. He had slides taken in penal institutions abroad that were of interest to the class, and there was dancing and refreshments afterwards.

The class found Mrs. Hartwell a vivacious woman not much older than themselves, and a real eyeful to behold. As a thirty-nine year old bachelor, Charles Kovac admitted he had also been enchanted with her natural appeal. But, Charles had more than a morbid reason to use the heinous murder of Marion Hartwell as the subject. He read a copy of what the class was now silently absorbing, for typographical errors.



THE UNSOLVED MURDER of Marion Hartwell has been well reported in the papers. The following is a review of the facts.

Marion Hartwell was twenty-seven years old, attractive, and to all appearances, happily married. Her husband, who discovered the body upon his return from classes at five-thirty P.M. on Tuesday afternoon of February 7th, was hospitalized from the shock. Medical reports state he was not feigning his emotional instability. Irrespective of this, a husband must be considered a prime suspect until proven innocent.

The established time of death is reported to have occurred at approximately nine in the morning. Obviously, the husband could have murdered his wife before he left for classes. However, teachers and students questioned all reported nothing unusual in Marty Hartwell's behavior that day. Please consider, those interviewed were giving recollections of indifference. If they had known Marty's wife had been murdered, they would have viewed the man with entirely different eyes. Some people would have reported that he acted suspicious, whether he did or not. Similar cases have supported this theory.

When Marty Hartwell moved here from the East two months ago, he rented a house only a block from the campus. All of you have been to his home. Marty

stated he and his wife never quarreled. Hurried reports from the East tend to confirm they led a happy married life. Neighbors and the few people here who knew them also attest to their compatibility. However, this cannot be confirmed or denied by the victim.

The police say the motive for the killing was not robbery. Nothing was taken from the home. If the murder were committed by the husband, and he was aware of what the police customarily regard as an evidence of guilt, nothing should be missing. It could be more decisive against the husband if something valuable *were* missing. It could clearly point to a premeditative murder, cleverly arranged to appear a robbery killing, whether it was or not. True logic has many paths to follow.

Nevertheless, we *can* conclude that it was a crime of revenge, passion, or a senseless killing by a homicidal psychopath—if we bypass the husband. Revenge seems the last factor to search, considering the propriety of their lives. It is also extremely remote that a stranger, a madman, could have entered the home and killed Mrs. Hartwell without provocation. This leaves a crime of passion, substantiated by the fact the victim's nylon blouse was ripped at the seams.

The evidence is strong that the victim was killed while resisting attack. She was killed with her

own butcher knife while in the kitchen. At least, the husband identified the knife as theirs. No other knife has been found and therefore the reasoning: an unpremeditated murder.

If we assume it was a murder brought on by a rejection of passion, we nearly eliminate the husband as a suspect. However, a startling possibility to remember is: he might have arranged it that way. If he did not, then it narrows down to the few people the victim knew.

There were three cups of coffee found on the breakfast table. The husband's fingerprints were plentiful on one cup, and so were the victim's on another. But, the third cup, still filled with undrunk coffee, had only the victim's prints on the handle. From this it has been assumed, the victim knew her killer. She could have poured him coffee before the attack. I repeat, *were* it not arranged. Motive must not be forgotten. The victim's ten thousand dollar life policy is in favor of her husband.

Marion Hartwell knew few people here: several teachers, you, the members of the class, and five or six neighbors. The police are pertinently concerned with three neighbors. Foster Cattlige lives on the left side of the Hartwell home, in a two-story house. All homes on the block are two stories. He is a thirty-seven year old bachelor who lives by himself. He professes

to be a writer, and he wears thick eyeglasses. His picture in the paper shows him to have an abnormal stare from dilated eyes. He admits to being a recluse. Neighbors know little about him, except for a Mrs. Farrel who lives across the street. She states he writes paperback trash of such a lurid nature it should be banned.

Cattlige admitted to being home the day of the murder, but claimed he didn't hear a commotion or a scream. He said he had spoken to the victim on occasion, but only while in their respective back yards, where there is a fence between. The newspapers suggested that a man who lives vicariously through lurid writing might be dangerous. If judged by appearances, Cattlige could well be a maniac as pictured by television and movies.

I live on the other side of the Hartwell home. Outside of her husband, I knew the victim better than anyone involved in the case. I've taken coffee with both Hartwells on numerous mornings, and some mornings, when Mr. Hartwell had a class before mine, I had coffee alone with Marion Hartwell.

In my statement to the police, I said: "The morning of the murder I did not have coffee with Mrs. Hartwell. I fixed my own breakfast and happened to see Marty Hartwell leave by his back door a few minutes after nine A.M.

I left for my own classes some twenty-five minutes later. I did not enter the Hartwell home, nor did I hear a disturbance."

Obviously, because of the time element, I am a major suspect. I have absolutely no collateral alibi to place me elsewhere at the time of the killing. Other circumstances point to me. Acquaintances of mine have testified that I am unusually interested in attractive women. Two individuals reported me more than interested in Mrs. Hartwell.

The police think I made unwelcomed advances and when spurned, killed her when she threatened to tell her husband. Though I vehemently deny making advances or killing Mrs. Hartwell, the circumstantial evidence is strong enough to justify my arrest on grounds of suspicion. This I freely admit.

The third neighbor of consequence is the woman across the street, Mrs. Farrel. She visited the victim frequently. Mrs. Farrel is a widow in her forties, lives alone, and is considered by some to be attractive. She is an outspoken woman, though she claims to have been friendly with Mrs. Hartwell. She admits to having had several exchanges of sharp words with Foster Cattlige, because his cat prowls her back yard. She has a particular dislike for animals. Because my small dog invariably investigates her front lawn, I also

have experienced her vocal animosity.

Mrs. Farrel has a violent temper. Witnesses have reported that Mrs. Farrel has thrown objects at Mr. Cattlige when he crossed the street to fetch his cat from her back yard.

Mrs. Farrel stated that the victim was a sweet girl who loved her husband, and who lamented a lack of friends out here in the West. She said Mrs. Hartwell seldom went anywhere without her husband. Mrs. Farrel also made a surprising statement: She said, she didn't believe a husband should leave an attractive wife alone during the day. She said nothing about the nights. Mr. Hartwell is writing a book and spends considerable time away doing research. Many of you, whom he invited to drop by anytime you needed help on assignments, received capable instruction from Marion Hartwell, when her husband was not at home.

The following is the list of suspects:

One—A transient maniac.

Two—Myself.

Three—The husband.

Four—Foster Cattlige.

Five—Mrs. Farrel (listing her shouldn't surprise you).

Six—A student here at the university.

Seven—A member of the faculty.

I want you to turn in a sum-

mary tomorrow, listing in order which suspects you would pursue as the most likely murderer. With your number one choice, list your reasons. The more logic you present, the higher I will grade your papers. I caution you, should you be convinced that I am the killer, don't hesitate to bring in a bill of particulars.

CHARLES KOVAC was no sooner home than his doorbell rang. He found Merle Rodale, a former student of his, standing there.

"I feel like something of an ass coming here," Merle said.

"A detective should never apologize," Charles answered. He had helped Merle on many cases in the past five years, and had a great respect for the sagacity of the tall, muscular young man. "Is this an official visit?" he asked.

Merle nodded as he walked into the living room and sank into a chair by the window. "Can't stall any longer," he said. "The department wants me to make an arrest."

"Good. Whom have you come up with?"

Merle Rodale tightened his lips. "That's the hell of it. You! I've just been out to the sanitarium with Marty Hartwell. He still thinks you did it. The papers think you did it. My lieutenant has been breathing down my neck. I'm supposed to prove it."

"What do you think?"

Merle pulled his hat from his

crew-cut blond hair. "I won't kid you, Chuck. I think it had to be you. Here's how I've worked it out. Some way or other, she led you on. You must have stabbed her in a fit of anger. But your analytical mind convinced you that if you looked damned guilty it would be illogical to suspect you. Right?"

"I'll check the coffee water," Charles said. A moment he reappeared and smiled from the kitchen doorway. "Did you want a confession?"

"Fat chance. You wouldn't admit your name is rightfully yours. You'd point out that the hospital where you were born might have mixed up the babies. But I've still got to arrest you. Strange thing is, I feel it won't make any difference to our friendship. Am I right?"

"Positively. Let's have the coffee in the kitchen." Charles set cups on the table, and remembered the sugar for Rodale.

"You're a good detective, Merle," he said. "The only mistake you make is choosing me."

Merle grimaced. "I know it," he said, straddling a chair. "Chuck, answer me truthfully. If you had killed her, and I asked you, would you deny it?"

"Naturally."

Merle grabbed the sugar in disgust. "Naturally! What kind of answer is that?" he demanded.

"Self preservation. Watch the water; it might splatter."

Merle watched Charles pour the hot water onto the instant, brown powder in the cups. "I heard about the assignment you gave your class," Merle said. "What audacity! You're hoping they'd come up with new angles for your defense? Listen, I know Marion came over here many a night when Marty worked late."

"Of course she did. As a matter of fact, you dropped by one night and the three of us played pinochle. Which reminds me," Charles said, and grinned, "did you add your name as a possible suspect?"

Merle angrily pulled out a cigarette. "To your surprise, Mr. Teacher, that's all in my report."

Charles Kovac winked. "I was sure it would be."

"Why wouldn't it be? Why don't you tell me you didn't do it?"

"All right. I didn't do it."

Merle screwed up his face. "There you go again," he complained. He lit his cigarette. "You're the most illogical guy I've ever met."

"Perhaps. But, I'm not the violent type."

"Big deal. You're the one who taught me the most meek of men can go berserk. Whom do you suspect? Cattlidge?"

"No."

"Not Hartwell?"

"No."

"Well, don't make me guess!"

Charles Kovac pulled out his

pipe as Rodale glared at him. "I'm not clairvoyant, Merle. It could have been either man. I don't rule them out. I'm eliminating other possibilities first before I center on them. Let's reason together on this. What was your real honest opinion of Marion Hartwell?"

Merle shrugged reflectively. "Very nice girl. Warm, good looking. I think she was lonely." He took a sip of coffee. "She liked, you know, parties, people—good times."

"Do you think she loved Marty?"

"Yes, I'd say so. She talked a lot about him when we played cards. I'd say she did."

Charles nodded. "So would I. But there was another part to her personality. I wonder if you noticed? I've thought about it a great deal. Many girls who are attractive to men feel a need to reassure themselves as the years pass. She was aware of her charm."

"Yeah!" Merle agreed. "She unconsciously flirted. Not boldly," he added eagerly, "but you could sure notice it. She had a coquettish glint in her eyes. Is that what you mean?"

"Exactly. She was fascinating to watch, though it was nothing more than an innocuous display of an allure she was proud of."

"So some man thought she gave him the come-on?"

"Could be," Charles conceded.

"And he came to see her and was rejected."

"Very likely."

"Who was it?"

"I don't know."

Merle's excitement suddenly died. "Ah, hell! I thought you'd singled someone out."

"No one individual," Charles said, relighting his pipe. "It seems to me it would have to be a man who had not had much experience with women—especially older women more mature than himself."

Merle snapped his fingers. "A student!"

"Possibly."

"Then that's why you had them — Okay. I won't take you in for another day." Merle Rodale suddenly frowned. "What can you learn from their reports?"

"I'm not sure. How about a game of chess?"

"Not tonight. My wife's anxiously waiting to hear if I took you in. She wants you to dinner next Saturday night. She has another girl for you to meet. What do women see in a skinny frog like you?"

Charles Kovac grinned. "Thank her again for the last delicious meal. And tell her I'll be delighted."

Merle got out of his chair with grim concordance. "I'll tell her, if things work out. Be here tomorrow, Charles. Maybe you can explain a new angle to clear yourself." Rodale left.



The next day, Merle had to argue Lieutenant Byron Merced out of bringing Charles Kovac in. "I don't think we could get an indictment on what we've got. And you know Kovac. It would be a waste of time questioning him further. Let's wait."

When Merle Rodale stood on Charles Kovac's porch waiting for him in the late afternoon, he wondered if he were right. No one really knew another person. Charles was a unique character. It bothered him that Charles ran exceptionally high fevers during recurring bouts with the flu. Charles might have been out of his head. He might not even know he had killed Marion.

Merle was surprised to see Marty Hartwell unexpectedly drive into his own driveway. Hartwell's face was drawn and his eyes were rimmed with shadows from lack of sleep. Merle saw him glance up with recognition in his eyes an instant before he disappeared into the house.

Merle understood his lack of greeting when he saw Charles Kovac coming down the sidewalk. Apparently Marty had no intention of greeting Charles with so much as a nod.

As Charles, with a smile on his face, climbed the porch steps, Mrs. Farrel hurried across the street. She stopped at the bottom step just as Charles gained the top.

"You going to arrest him?" Mrs. Farrel demanded.

As Charles turned in surprise, Merle looked at her.

"Any reason I should?" he asked.

Mrs. Farrel's eyes flashed. "He murdered her," she said, with bitter accusation in her voice.

"How do you know that?" Merle snapped back.

"Everybody says so. The papers say so."

"I see. And you say so, too?"

"Yes!"

Merle Rodale scowled. "Mrs. Farrel, Mr. Kovac can sue you for slander. Stay on your own side of the street and let the police handle this."

Without another word Mrs. Farrel marched across the street, entered her house and slammed the door. Charles Kovac grinned. "I'm not popular." He stopped smiling. "Is that Marty's car?"

"Yeah," Merle said. "Keep away from him. He's still broken up. Not responsible. You know what that means, what it could

lead to. Anyway, what about the reports?"

Charles Kovac took him in and spread the papers on the table. "All thirty-three of the students turned them in," he said. "Sit down."

"He drew up a chair for himself. 'Look, we have a difference of opinion,' he said as he shuffled the papers into piles. 'Here are twenty-six reports that list an unknown maniac as number one. Two believe Cattlige did it. Two more—both girls, please notice—list Hartwell on top. And, three students had the gall to make me their prime target. No one listed Mrs. Farrel, a student, or a member of the faculty.'"

Merle Rodale was puzzled. "What do you get from that?"

"Absolutely nothing," Kovac retorted, and then laughed at Merle's sardonic expression. "I am interested in their last choice. But first—read this one. The boy lists a maniac first and me second. In his comments he pointed out that it was not public knowledge the seams of the victim's blouse were torn. He's pretty sharp. He evidently re-checked the newspaper accounts. The papers reported that her red blouse was torn. They did not print that it was made out of nylon, which is difficult to tear, or that it was only torn at the seams.

He reasoned that only the police, and the murderer could know that. But he gave me the benefit of

a doubt. He guessed, that as a neighbor, I might have entered the kitchen during the excitement when the police arrived. He says here: 'Until the point is clarified, I'll choose a maniac first and Mr. Kovac second.' Pretty good, huh?"

"Yeah. How did you know the seam was ripped?"

"I noticed it when I saw her."

"You denied going into the house."

"I wasn't in the house. I arrived home when they removed the body. I was out in front with other neighbors. One of the attendants accidentally stepped on the sheet covering the stretcher and stripped it from the body. One woman fainted."

"I can check that."

"I'm sure you will. Now, to get to the last choice. What do you think of this? Seven of the eight girls list faculty members as their last choice. The other girl lists me. I must remember to reward her with a good grade."

Merle looked at him curiously. "You get a kick out of this?"

Charles Kovac stopped smiling. "Merle, you know better. My poor taste in humor was meant to cheer you. You haven't given me a grin since this happened. Anyway, pay attention here. Look at this boy's list." Merle took it and read:

One—A transient maniac.

Two—Foster Cattlige.

Three—Marty Hartwell.

Four.—A student.

Five—Charles Kovac.

Six—Mrs. Farrel.

Seven—A faculty member.

Merle Rodale shook his head. His eyes were troubled. "I don't get a thing from it."

Charles sat back and pulled out his pipe. "By itself, it's meaningless. But compared to the other boy's lists, I think it's incriminating. Maybe not proof positive, but it is something to ponder. Look here! Every male in the class has listed a student last or next to last. Why did he place a student as high up as fourth?"

"By chance?"

"Possibly. But, suppose he were the killer? How would he list himself in the list of suspects? Last? I don't believe so. I think he'd place himself in the middle of the pack, as less likely to be noticed. And there it is. Exactly in the middle and the only one in the class. It was all I could hope for. If other males haphazardly listed a student up and down the list, the experiment would have failed. As it is, this boy, Burton Van Zandt, seems to me a likely suspect. What do you think?"

Merle sat a moment and then gave a doubtful shrug. "I don't know. It's reaching far out. I'll pick him up!" Merle got to his feet. "Charles. I've got a weird premonition—Something is very wrong, and I don't know what it is. It's just that, deep down, I know you did it. I hope I'm wrong."

Charles stood at the door watching Merle walk away.

It took Merle several hours to locate Burton Van Zandt. It was after eleven P.M. when Merle took him to the station. The tall, gaunt-looking youth complained: "Why me? Why pick on me? I haven't done anything."

Merle Rodale and Lieutenant Merced both questioned him. The lieutenant informed him: "Van Zandt, you're twenty-one years old and an adult. How about it? You were seen leaving the Hartwell home that morning."

Burton's eyes opened wide. "You're wrong," he cried. "Why it's absolutely crazy. It wasn't me."

Merle stared at him. "Maybe you didn't kill her, but perhaps you arrived after it happened? Is that how it was?"

"No! No! I wasn't there!"

Merle didn't finish his questioning. A call came in that Mrs. Farrel had been murdered in her upstairs bedroom. The Farrel home was only five blocks from the station. Rodale, accompanied by the solemn Lieutenant Merced, raced a patrol car to the house. They nearly hit people in the driveway as they skidded to a stop. An hysterical woman grabbed Merle's arm as he sprang from the car.

"I called you," she shouted. "I heard her screaming upstairs."

Lieutenant Merced ran down the driveway. "I'll take the back," he yelled.

Merle shot up the front steps two at a time with his pistol gripped in his hand. The front door was unlocked and he swung it open and jumped inside. It was dark. When his hand found the light switch, he simultaneously snapped it on as he ducked to the side. Merle heard someone at the top of the stairs and at the same time heard the back door creak open. He pointed his gun up the stairs.

"Come down with your hands up!" he shouted.

As he waited he watched the stairs and the doorway to the kitchen. It just might not be Byron coming in the back. If a maniac were loose in the house with a weapon, there wouldn't be time to argue. A maniac could be diabolically clever.

Merle heard the soft footsteps of someone coming down the stairs. He felt gooseflesh form on his neck as a horrible premonition that he knew who the maniac was going to be swept over him. When he saw he had guessed right, it sickened him. But he held the gun steady. He was alert to any sudden movement of the man who stood smiling at him half way up the stairs.

Charles Kovac had his hands in the air, and he moved slowly and cautiously down the stairs. Before he reached the bottom, Lieutenant Merced burst out of the kitchen on the run. He saw Charles and

raced to him before Charles reached the bottom step. He quickly handcuffed Charles as Merle avoided Charles' eyes. Merle vaulted past both men and headed up the steps.

"I'll check up here," he hurled back.

At the top of the stairs Merle saw one bedroom door partly open. He hurried to it and kicked it wider with his foot before looking inside. Mrs. Farrel was lying on the bed, white as death, with her eyes closed. She was in her nightgown and had the covers tightly clutched to her bosom.

Merle checked the room with professional caution before rushing to her. It was an ironic part of Charles' training—accept nothing as fact. If Charles were some impossible way innocent, a madman could be lurking behind the door or in the closet.

He saw the hook-latch on the floor. Someone had broken into the bedroom by force. The eyebolt screw had splintered the wood where it was torn from the door frame.

Mrs. Farrel was breathing. She appeared only to be in a faint. When Merle coaxed her awake she was instantly hysterical.

"Cattlige!" she screamed, when recognizing Merle Rodale as a detective. "He tried to break in and kill me! I saw him!"

Downstairs, dressed in her robe, she hurled accusations with con-



vulsive breaths. "It was Cattlige! First he tried to get in through my window. Then he entered the house. I heard him run up the stairs! He broke in the bedroom door!"

Merle left to get Cattlige. Curious neighbors were standing on the porch and peering in. Still in his handcuffs, Charles Kovac confronted Mrs. Farrel.

"I broke in your bedroom door, Mrs. Farrel. You kept screaming for help. You wouldn't answer me."

Mrs. Farrel was too distraught to understand. She still shouted Cattlige's name until Cattlige arrived with defiant eyes.

"You bitch!" he hurled at her. "I was in your tree, yes! I climbed up to get my cat. When you started screaming like a banshee, my cat scratched me and ran home. I told you to shut up! But you wouldn't open the window; you just yelled all the louder."

Mrs. Farrel's eyes blazed at him. "You tried to kill me! Just like you did Marion!"

Foster Cattlige grimaced and turned to Lieutenant Merced. "She's out of her head. And, she ought to be arrested. This woman puts out poison for animals that stray into her yard. I can prove it."

Rodale pointed a finger at him. "Is that a reason to kill her! What about Marion Hartwell? Did she try to poison your cat, too?"

Cattlige raised his eyes hopelessly. "Certainly not! She liked my cat."

Mrs. Farrel beckoned to the neighbors. "Come in! Come on in. He's the killer. He might attack you next."

Cattlige frowned at Lieutenant Merced. "I've had enough of this. I wish to call my attorney."

The lieutenant pointed towards the door. He had Cattlige and Charles go with them to the station. Merle removed Charles' handcuffs and then each man was allowed to make a statement. They were then released, but Merle guided Charles to a separate room. Charles was amused as Merle re-read his statement. Merle finished it and offered him a cigarette.

"I knew it would be tight," Merle nodded. "You heard her screaming. You ran across the street and used a pass key to open her door. Damn convenient having a pass key. Of course, you say, the key will work most of the old locks up and down the street. You mention it will work the Hartwell's, too. Then you point out, the neighbors who have not changed their locks, have keys that match yours." Merle Rodale sighed.

"Anyway, so you raced upstairs and called to her. She wouldn't stop screaming, so you broke in the door. You then discovered that she had fainted. That's when you heard the police."

Charles Kovac nodded. "Quite accurate. You see? A perfect example of why the ordinary citizen doesn't involve himself when a crime is being committed. But, not considering myself ordinary, I plunged into trouble."

Merle offered him a light for the cigarette. "I wonder if you would have killed her if we hadn't arrived? You could still be a psycho."

"That's not what I taught you," Kovac grinned. "You should get all the facts, before tearing them apart. One thing: Several of the neighbors were out in front when I dashed up the steps and entered the house. I saw them. They certainly recognized me."

"You're assuming yourself to be a clever murderer who doesn't kill before witnesses. Oh, hell! What's the use. You've convinced me. I wouldn't believe you killed Mrs. Hartwell if you admitted it. So now where are we? How about Catlige?"

"I saw him run back across the street. From all appearances, he was over there."

Merle gritted his teeth. "Did he kill Marion Hartwell?"

"Most unlikely. No motive. And, he was acutely rational when greatly angered. He's not a maniac." Charles puffed out smoke. "I think you have the killer in custody."

"Burton Van Zandt? Would you like to question him?"

Charles Kovac nodded.

Van Zandt was disturbed to find Charles in the room when he was brought in. He seated himself in a chair and defiantly crossed his long legs and folded his arms. "I wish you'd straighten these imbeciles out, Mr. Kovac. They said I was seen that morning leaving Mrs. Hartwell's house. Good grief!"

Charles looked at Merle. "How could you tell a lie like that?" He grinned at Burton. "I'm here on the same charge. But, I think we've got them. It couldn't have been both of us. Even if they do have proof it was somebody from the college."

Van Zandt shrugged. "They probably don't have that, either," he said.

"Oh, they have that. It seems Marion Hartwell was, well, a rather promiscuous young lady. The students didn't come to her home when her husband worked late. It's quite a scandal. Everybody is involved. Weren't you one of the boys who called on her at night?"

"Not me. I work at the library in the evenings."

"That's right, you do. When did you go to see her? You know the police have her diary. It's got my name in it, several fellows from the class, and your name." Charles watched Burton Van Zandt pale. "Weren't you absent that Tuesday?"

Van Zandt gasped. "I was sick. I had a cold."

Charles nodded. "Marion Hartwell was more than free with her favors. The police only want you to admit your relations with her. She didn't care who—"

"That's a lie. I—"

"Yes?"

"I don't know. I didn't kill her."

"She was so free with the rest of us, how come she fought you off?"

"I don't know. I mean—"

"Did some of the guys tell you they made time with her?"

"Yes, damn them!"

"And still she held out on you?"

"Yes."

"Did she threaten to tell her husband?"

Burton Van Zandt lowered his head. He finally sighed and looked up at Charles. "Mr. Kovac, are you going to help me? I don't know how it happened. I really don't know."

Merle Rodale shook his head after Burton Von Zandt was taken away. "Charles," he said after a long silence. "I don't understand

how it could have happened. Mrs. Hartwell was anything but the kind of woman you described to him."

Charles Kovac tapped his cigarette on the ash tray. He decided he preferred his pipe and snuffed it out. His face was solemn when he looked up. "Not in Burton's eyes, Merle. He's a highly strung young man. I think you'll discover he hasn't dated girls, but desperately wanted to. When Marion was nice to him at the parties, he undoubtedly became infatuated with her. The other boys noticed and ganged up to tease him with whopping lies. That's always an incitement to murder. Malicious humor is often deadly."

Charles Kovacs stood up and pulled out his pipe. "Remember to watch for it," he said.

Merle Rodale grinned as he got to his feet. "Chuck, did you think it was a student from the start?"

Charles Kovac opened his eyes wide. "I'll say not! I thought you did it."



INTRIGUE AT TARANTO

by T. C. McCLARY

A New Terrifying Espionage Novelet Next Month

BRUTUS
is an
Honorable Man

by
EVELYN BOND

Buddy had an unshaken faith in people . . . until crime destroyed his boy's world of bright illusions.

BUDDY KLEINERT was carrying the windbreaker in one arm as he ran to the door. He had put a small, sticky hand on the knob when Uncle Simon's big fingers gripped him firmly by the back of the neck.

"Now where do you think you're going this time of night, young fellow?" Uncle Simon asked.

Buddy had to stop cold because the fingers wouldn't let go. When he plunked his feet down flat against the highly polished floor, Uncle Simon raised his hand a little and moved it to the right. Bud-



dy didn't look up, because his eyes were on the door and nothing else.

"Well, young fellow? Answer your uncle when he talks to you."

"I'm going out to—to play."

"At half-past seven?" Uncle Simon asked. "Little boys take risks when they go roaming around alone at night. I wouldn't be surprised if you got arrested. After all, the police next door don't know us too well, and in the darkness they might mistake you for Joe Ritter himself."

"I just wanna go out and play."

"I doubt that very much. Why would a boy your age run out when the police are in the house next door, waiting for a chance to arrest the tenant as soon as he gets back? Why would he just happen to pick that particular time? If you were to bump into Ritter coming home from the railroad station you might accidentally—"

Buddy looked up now because of the silence that ensued. Uncle Simon's thick brows were contracted, and his jaw was set in tight lines.

"Now just a minute, young fellow," he went on. "Did you have some crazy idea of letting Ritter know that the police have come for him? Were you going to act like that out of a mistaken sense of loyalty to a criminal?"

Buddy swallowed, but didn't say anything. All he knew about Mr. Ritter was that the man would sit

with him under a big tree for hours when it was summer, and Mr. Ritter would watch Buddy dig a hole in the ground near that tree and explain how an atomic submarine worked under water. The U.S.S. Great, Buddy called the ship. Buddy was going to be the captain of a submarine when he grew up, and Mr. Ritter was the only person who'd listen to him talk about it.

Uncle Simon gave one of his sour little grins. "So that is the answer, isn't it?"

The fingers were on the back of Buddy's neck again, tighter than before. Uncle Simon turned slightly and raised his voice. "Claire, this nephew of yours thinks more highly of criminals than he does of honest people."

Aunt Claire emerged swiftly from the kitchen, taking birdlike little steps on her way over to him. She went down on her knees, so that the two of them would be eye-to-eye, and put a friendly hand around him.

"Buddy's all right," she said, crooning the words. "Claire's little nephew is all right, isn't he? He doesn't want to get Uncle Simon upset, does he? Claire's nephew doesn't really like that nasty old Mr. Ritter."

Buddy said sullenly, "Mr. Ritter's not nasty."

"Just because I've seen you digging holes around the big tree in that man's yard doesn't mean he's

a friend of yours. Why, your Uncle Simon—take your hand away from him, Si, for heaven's sake!—is the best friend you'll ever have."

Buddy, surprised to hear that, looked long and steadily at Uncle Simon. His uncle didn't seem like a friend—or an enemy, either. He just seemed like something that had been chipped out of rock.

"You stay home, dear," Aunt Claire said, "and I'll tell you what we'll do. You'll watch television and you can stay up until ten o'clock. Won't that be wonderful?"

Uncle Simon made some sort of a growling noise deep in his throat.

Buddy glanced at the closed window of the living room and said, "All right."

"That's fine, dear," Aunt Claire said, patting him on the head. "Now you sit right down in front of the set and I'll bring you some chocolate pudding with whipped cream on it and an ice-cold glass of milk. And please—put your windbreaker away. That's a good boy."

Buddy shrugged off the windbreaker and hung it while Uncle Simon watched sourly, then walked into the living room and turned on the T.V. set. But before the picture came on he darted to the window and got it a little bit open; so that he could open it wider when he saw Mr. Ritter coming, and warn him that the police were at the house he'd rented, and were waiting to ar-

rest him. All he could see was a narrow patch of moonlight and the road leading to Mr. Ritter's house.

He ran back to the T.V. set when he heard Aunt Claire's footsteps approaching the living room. As soon as she had gone away again, he left the milk and pudding on the tray for the first time in his whole life and ran back to the window. He was still watching when he heard Uncle Simon's heavy footsteps in the hall and got back to the set again just in time.

"I wanted to make sure you weren't looking at some trashy program," Uncle Simon said. He glanced at the partly opened window, "I can see what you've actually been watching. You'll watch the wall of your bedroom for the rest of tonight, young fellow. You're going to bed."

"But you promised I could stay up and —"

"I don't like a cheater who says he'll do one thing, and does something else entirely," Uncle Simon told him. "And I don't like somebody who helps criminals make a mockery of the law. Now are you going to bed under your own steam, or will I have to carry you?"

"I'll go," Buddy said sadly. He turned off the T.V. right in the middle of a program about a submarine that almost looked like the U.S.S. Great, and nearly ran up to his bedroom.

He was all set for bed five min-

utes after Uncle Simon had sent him there, and he fidgeted while Aunt Claire tucked him in, and kissed him good night. His eyes were wide open after she turned the light out, and he could hear steps on the staircase going down to the first floor.

"A boy of that age," Uncle Simon said as his words became harder to make out, "shouldn't admire a criminal."

And Aunt Claire's high and skittery voice said, "But he's only a child!"

Buddy waited till he couldn't hear them any more, then got out of bed softly and out of the room. He tiptoed down the hall and over to the guest room where he could see out toward Mr. Ritter's house. He opened the window a few inches, and settled down to—

Mr. Ritter was coming!

It happened so fast that Buddy was hardly able to take a deep breath before it was over. Buddy opened the window as wide as it would go just as Mr. Ritter stepped out of his Chevelle, and shouted: "Cops, Mr. Ritter! They're waiting to arrest you!"

Mr. Ritter dropped down in back of his car, and a chunk of fire spurted out of the darkness and disappeared. It sounded different from shots on T.V. It was a lot louder, and it made Buddy's ears ring. Then a shot came from a different direction, and Mr. Ritter gasped and called out very loudly:

"I'll kill every one of you! You won't touch me again."

Buddy shouted, "Don't do that, Mr. Ritter. Please don't—"

Another shot, and another gasp. Buddy felt for the first time he could remember as if the world had come to an end. He had liked Mr. Ritter. He had trusted him and had talked a lot to him. And now Mr. Ritter was turning out to be the sort of man who actually wanted to kill other people. It was awful, just awful. How could he ever have called Mr. Ritter a friend?

Buddy got back into bed, tucking himself in just as Aunt Claire came up to see if he was all right and the noise hadn't awakened him. He lay there with his eyes closed, not even moving when Aunt Claire lightly brushed his lips with hers.

"You're a faker," she said cheerily, and left.

He didn't think he'd ever sleep again in his whole life. But he slept that night. And he was sure he wouldn't be able to make himself eat again, but he wolfed down a heavy breakfast in the morning. He couldn't stop thinking about Mr. Ritter all the time, but he ate pretty well in spite of it.

Uncle Simon sat at the head of the table, wearing bi-focals and a shirt and jacket. Buddy had never known him to come to the table in pajamas or bathrobe. Uncle Simon was drinking coffee and

reading the front page of the *East-port Chronicle*. Aunt Claire bustled back and forth from the kitchen to the dining room, making sure that there was enough food for everyone.

"Fifty thousand dollars," Uncle Simon said, looking up at Aunt Claire. He sounded disapproving, and there was something like a catch in his throat. "The man got away with fifty thousand dollars in unmarked bills. Mind you, Claire, in *unmarked bills*. They could be spent anywhere."

Aunt Claire threw a nervous glance in Buddy's direction and said meaningfully, "Let's not talk about it now."

"Nonsense! It can't do the boy any harm to know what kind of man his thieving 'friend' is."

"He's not my friend," Buddy said stonily. "Not any more he isn't."

"That's true enough, technically," Uncle Simon said. "He happens to be dead."

Aunt Claire looked startled. "He *died*?"

"Yes," Uncle Simon confirmed. He did not sound particularly angry now. "I'm afraid the money he stole is never going to be found."

Buddy couldn't have cared less. He finished his milk with a gulp and ran out of the kitchen. It was Saturday and he guessed he'd go over to Jack Jergens' house to see if they could get enough guys for



a game of football. He did that every Saturday during the football season.

On his way to the closet he overheard Uncle Simon saying: "The police asked Ritter where the money was hidden, and he smiled and said, 'It's near the grate.' Then he died. Near what grate, for heaven's sake?"

Aunt Claire said: "You'd think that if a man had stolen fifty thousand dollars in unmarked bills, he'd give clearer directions for finding it than that."

Buddy had been putting on his windbreaker. But now he stopped abruptly and stood motionless for a full minute. It was the funniest thing to stand quiet like that when he didn't have to, just as if he was in school. He didn't really know

what he was thinking about either, in a way. But he stood there till he realized he was going to be late at Jack's place unless he got a move on.

Jack didn't feel like playing football this early, so the two of them went for a walk. They were looking at a Chevelle car in the showroom when Buddy suddenly asked:

"Do you know when Mr. Ritter will be coming back?"

Jack let out a guffaw. "He'll never come back, stupid. He's dead. It says so on the radio. The cops killed him before he could knock off any of them."

Buddy was able to think his own thoughts for awhile, because Jack was so fiercely interested in the car. If Mr. Ritter wasn't ever coming back, then he couldn't get sore at Buddy for doing what Buddy was almost certainly going to do. He may not have been the sort of friend Buddy had thought he was, but there was no reason for Buddy to hurt him, either.

He went home for lunch and spent a little time later on looking at Mr. Ritter's house and grounds. He had promised to get in some football with Jack as well as a few other guys. He did it. After dinner—Uncle Simon always referred to the last meal of the day as supper—Buddy could sit up and watch T.V. until half-past nine. But tonight he said he'd go to sleep early.

He went to bed for a while, at least, but at ten o'clock he got up quietly, and put his clothes on again. He didn't have any trouble getting out of the house without being heard or taking the half-size pick and shovel from the garage without disturbing Uncle Simon and Aunt Claire.

He ran to the big tree where he and Mr. Ritter used to sit and talk, and where Buddy would tell him about the submarine that he'd be in command of one of these days—the U.S.S. Great.

As soon as Buddy reached the place and put his tools down quietly, he started to dig. He had always rooted around in the earth with his bare hands before. But now it was easier for him once he learned how to use the implements without too much trouble. Besides, he was in a hurry. Not far from the spot where he would sometimes dig with his hands, the shovel struck something that made a dull noise.

It turned out to be a leather suitcase, the kind that Dr. Hunt would bring along to the house when Buddy was sick. Buddy put the leather suitcase and the pick away in the garage first, then came back for the shovel. While he was at it, he shovelled some of the dirt back in place, because he didn't want to ruin the grounds where he had spent so much time with a friend.

He was thinking hard when he

brought the shovel back to the garage. He had gotten the money out of there because he wanted to show Uncle Simon that he had never really admired crooks. His uncle might have been too strait-laced sometimes. But he had done a lot for him and Buddy wanted him to know that he could count on his nephew's being loyal and honest.

And, of course, he could imagine Uncle Simon congratulating him for once and being proud of him. Aunt Claire, too, of course. Especially Aunt Claire.

But if he went to Uncle Simon now, and showed him the money, would that prevent him from getting mad because Buddy had gone out so late at night? Uncle Simon was like that, sometimes, putting small things ahead of important ones and Buddy would have wasted all his work. He decided he'd wait till morning.

He slept until half-past seven, though, and Uncle Simon was gone for the afternoon by then. Buddy decided to take the leather bag and go to the police station down the road. He couldn't stand to have so much money close by for a long time, when none of it belonged to him.

The first policeman he talked to gave him a slight brushoff, but the next one was polite and the most important one, (Buddy nicknamed him 'The Amazing Colossal Man' because he was so tall)

a lieutenant, shook hands with him and gave him a receipt for the money, and took him home.

Uncle Simon and Aunt Claire were so surprised when Buddy and the lieutenant showed them the piece of paper and told them that he'd get a reward of two thousand dollars, that they were struck dumb. Uncle Simon especially. His face got more and more red, and it was odd to see his face getting the same color with pride as it usually did when he was angry.

It was Uncle Simon who watched the police lieutenant walk down the road. Then he whirled around, and Buddy suddenly felt something like warm iron crash against his face. It sent him spinning across the room.

"You stinking fool!" Uncle Simon said harshly, a fist extended. "Why didn't you tell me first?"

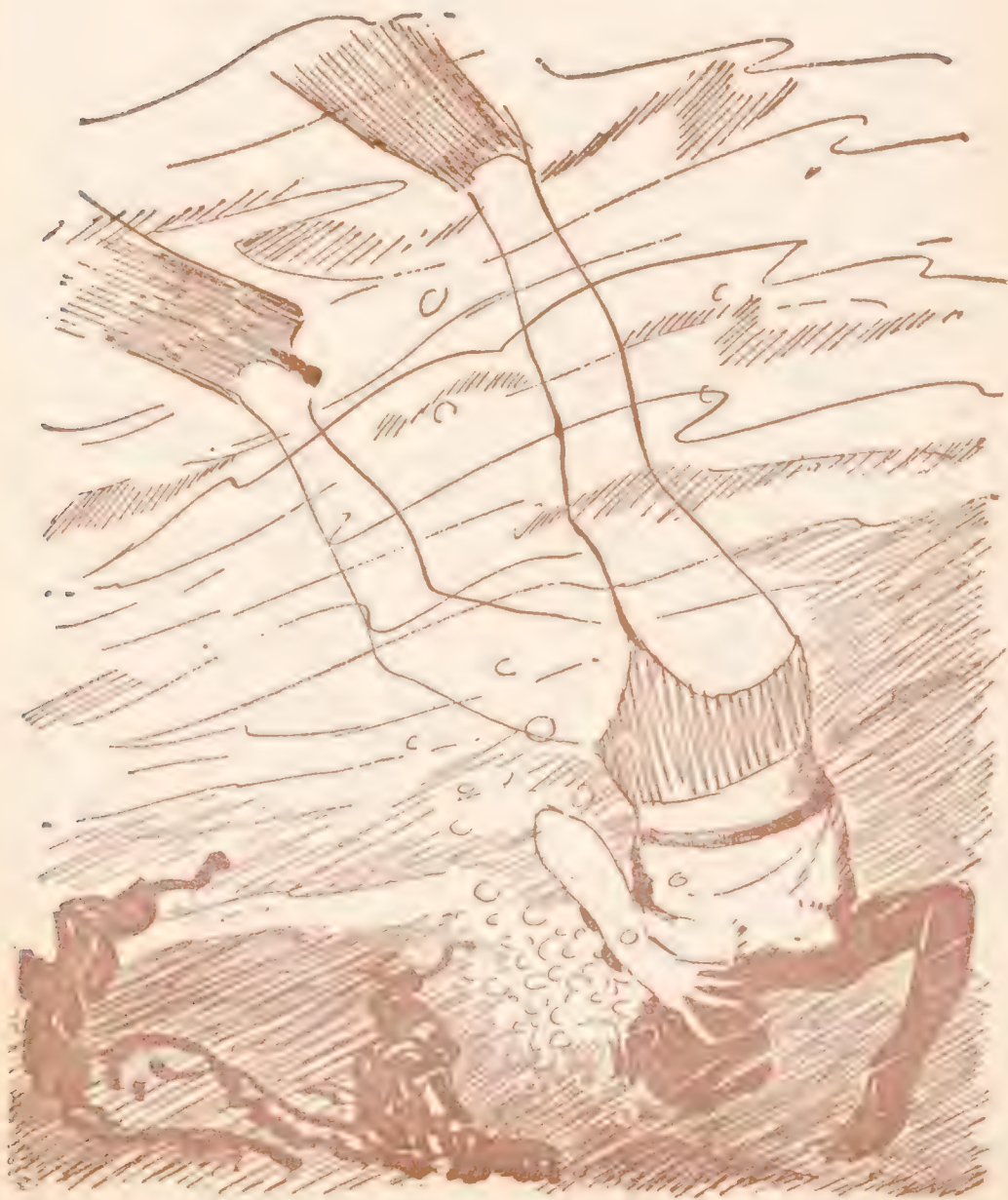
"I—I—"

"You dug up fifty thousand dollars in *unmarked bills* that we could've lived off for years, and you didn't say a word to me. Not a single goddam word!"

Buddy looked automatically for reaction toward Aunt Claire, but she was turning her back to him.

Standing there stunned, Buddy told himself that Uncle Simon was almost as big a crook as—as Mr. Ritter, and Aunt Claire was on her husband's side all the way. He felt that he wouldn't be able to trust anybody else, ever, for the rest of his life.

Featuring
MARIO FALDETTA





Captain Mario Faldetta of the Italiano Prefecture Segreto made his first MSMM appearance in MURDER IN LIGURIA in the June 1965 issue. We think you'll agree that in ebullience, sagacity and wit he has few rivals in modern mystery fiction.

THE WATER CURE

*The killer was a brutal madman.
But fiends in assorted colors
were Captain Faldetta's specialty.*

by TIGHE JARRATT

MY FRIEND Captain Mario Faldetta made a circumspect cloak-and-dagger approach across the beach. His labyrinthine course just happened to coincide with the pinchable derrieres of his most favored signorinas. Such a serpentine course was necessary for an officer of the *Prefecture Segreto*, he had once explained, as he must obviously attract a minimum of attention.

"After all," he had expostulated on that occasion, "you cannot just

arrive on the beaches of Liguria without a little pinch or two along the way. It would create suspicion and attract the attention of the whole beach, not to mention the insult to the signorinas."

By way of disguise and obscurity today, the captain wore an enormous fringed grass hat of bright orange that might have served for an airfield marker in bad weather. It contrasted nicely with his Chinese blue robe of one of the new fluorescent materials

that glowed beautifully for a full five miles.

Following him came his manservant, staggering under two sizeable wicker hampers, a red and white striped beach umbrella, a portable, polkadot cabana, and a five foot rubber seadragon, in case the captain felt like frolicking in the surf. To subdue the effect, Faldetta wore smoked glasses.

"Good morning, signor," he said, bowing formally as if he had never set eyes on me before. "You do not mind if I share your location on the beach?"

Again his intention was to deceive possible eavesdroppers, the nearest of whom was fifty yards away.

His manservant finally caught up, beet-red of face and gasping for breath. "You have younger legs than I, mi capitano," he apologized.

Faldetta whisked aside his beach robe to examine his chunky legs with self approval. "Of course," he agreed. "But I am a thoughtful master, Pietro. I will unpack the hampers while you erect the umbrella and cabana."

Removing his glittering blue robe from hairy shoulders, Faldetta got on his knees to unclasp the hamper. First he removed an inflatable mattress which jumped in my face when he released its compressed air capsule. Thereafter, he brought forth an enormous beach towel of lavender hue.

"The color soaks the harmful rays out of the reflection," he explained.

Then he removed a portable TV, a police radio, a movie camera, a still camera, a pair of binoculars, a snub-nosed Beretta, and a bottle of suntan lotion which he drafted me to apply to his back. He then produced a full box of cigars, of the same brand, I noticed, that a smuggler had offered me two nights before. The smuggler had been almost caught, but in some manner had escaped.

As if on prearranged schedule, Faldetta finished unpacking just as two bikinied temptations to mayhem undulated past. Automatically, Faldetta reached his movie camera and caught the rear action.

"Ah!" he sighed ecstatically, "what is more inspiring than youth? Female, that is. You approve of this year's beach styles?"

This year, they were wearing no halters, and bikinis had been reduced to a good facsimile of eye shadow.

"I think the fashions an improvement, myself," he beamed benignly. "They make deception impossible. Most assuredly, we are emerging into an age of truth."

He sat upon the lavender towel, crosslegged like a Buddha, and patted the cannonball bulge of his stomach fondly. "Not a wrinkle," he boasted. "Quite exceptional in a man of my age, don't you agree?"

He unclasped the second hamper to set forth a charcoal hibachi grill, which he set going with one of the expensive new electric torches I had noticed in the sports shop which Faldetta had confided was under police surveillance for selling contraband. He next produced an espresso coffee pot, a jug of water, chilled chicken from a thermal container, eggs, and an assortment of sliced peppers, salami, anchovies, mushrooms, olives and other requirements for a breakfast omelette. Meantime, he gestured hospitably toward a miniature built-in bar that offered cognac, Scotch, vodka, Pernod Fils, and vino. There was also an ice compartment.

By now, his manservant had finished erecting the umbrella and canvas cabana so that they would shade the captain and rule out any likelihood that the hot sun would disturb his daily sunbath.

"Very good," Faldetta approved. He glanced at his new platinum and diamond wrist watch, which was precisely like the one worn by a notorious confidence man before Faldetta had him locked up. "You may return at one o'clock to pick up these things," he said. "That will give you time to tidy up the villa."

"Gracios, mi capitano," Pietro replied gratefully, backing off as if Valdetta had done him the greatest favor.

"How the devil do you do it?"

I asked with envy. "My man tells me exactly what his plans are for the day, and will I please arrange my own day accordingly. Then he robs me blind to add insult to injury."

Faldetta smiled understandingly. "Perhaps you are not quite in the same position. You see, two of Pietro's friends were murdered the same night, and he is under police investigation. But under the law, I cannot investigate relatives or my own servants, and as there is no superior officer in this district, the investigation cannot be pursued as long as he works for me."

I frowned with disapproval. "Suppose he is actually guilty?"

"Then in the end he will get his just deserts. Meantime, I have rehabilitated him as an honest and useful member of society. He enjoys the benefits of freedom, and I enjoy a good manservant which helps me to deliver greater efficiency to the government."

He picked up his camera to catch a coming and going shot this time, enormously pleased with the result. "Art for art's sake, eh? Still, it is dismal to contemplate that I may be taking pictures of the next murder victim."

"You mean these monstrous sex murders?" I demanded.

Faldetta looked pained. "You Americans use such inept grammar. How, I ask you, can anything to do with sex be monstrous? Were

they sex murders, the killer would be understood and forgiven by any intelligent jury. But the fact is, there has been no sex connection with any of them." He shook his head. "It makes me doubt that the criminal is Italian."

"That last one made six this summer, and you don't even have a suspicion who the killer may be yet?"

"Oh, we have suspicions," he granted and waved his open hand toward the entire Legurian coastline. "Any man on the beach. That is, any skin diver, which could include my own frogmen."

"But this man's a vicious maniac."

"Yes, he must be," he agreed. "Who else would hate beautiful women so? And he has selected the most beautiful, I must say. That job of wedging the girl six fathoms deep in a cellophane bag was classic. He could watch the last twitch of her face. Almost a da Vinci streak of imagination in his range of technique. Have you noticed that no two of the murders bear the slightest similarity?"

"Except vicious brutality," I said with ire.

"Yes, you are right, there. He is truly dedicated to the gruesome."

He broke off and rose from his cross-legged position in one unbroken movement. "Ah, signorina la contessa! Your radiance dazzles the sun itself."

She paused upon the lower hard-packed sands to smile with coquetry. "Faldetta," she protested. "Some day some woman will believe you."

"Let me hope that it will be you," he said with gallantry. "You are heading for the breakwater, I suppose, to watch this one they call The Golden Adonis, playing like an otter in the killer surf upon the shoals?"

"He is remarkably handsome, isn't he?" she smiled.

"Yes, but I hear he disdains women. Or rather, the company of one woman in particular."

"Have you heard that, really?" she asked musingly. "I had not noticed. He is taking me scuba diving to witness the Sea Falls in the Rose Grotto."

Faldetta's face became gravely concerned. "My dear signorina, have you considered the possible danger?"

She laughed mockingly. "What danger could there be with a man who plays in the killer breakers as if they were wavelets in a swimming pool?"

"Perhaps you have a point there," Faldetta conceded. "I seem to remember you were instructed by the greatest lung diver of the Liguria."

Her face tightened haughtily. "Let us not speak of that beast, Ricco!"

Faldetta bowed. "A thousand pardons. Let us speak of the more

exciting. When will you visit the Sea Falls?"

"At turn of low tide, this afternoon. It is when the waters are lowest in the Grotto and the evening light penetrates most beautifully."

"That is correct," Faldetta agreed. "Be cautious that the incoming tidal sweep does not carry you behind the falls, however."

She looked off toward the breakwater, and the marching rows of crested surf smashing on the shoals beyond it. "A worthwhile man should be counted on, capitano."

"Quite so," he agreed, and took her nod with a deep bow from which, to my amazement, he straightened with his camera shooting.

"It is in the hip movement that a woman's character shows forth best," he remarked. "You notice—there is nothing saucy, nothing put on, to the contessa's walk. But it is arrogant. And sometimes arrogance blinds the possessor to a dangerous degree."

"You are worried about the Sea Falls?" I asked.

"Ah, they are beautiful, but a treacherous trap. Under them flows a reverse undertow that behind them turns into a vertical whirlpool."

Our omelette was done and he divided it evenly, but with secret grudge, I believe, upon gold-edged plates bearing the crest of a duke

he had recently arrested for a rather heinous murder.

He caught my eye upon the crest and explained, "A little token of appreciation from the duke. I was able to supply evidence that he was taunted beyond human endurance."

A veritable package of pulchritude, two girls, three, and then two again, drifted upbeach in the con-



tessa's footsteps. Faldetta regarded them with consternation.

"What has this Golden Adonis got, a magnet?" he demanded with a touch of personal affront. "It is too easy for him to be quite decent. His greatest problem must be which one to pick."

"Apparently, he had already chosen the contessa," I remarked.

"A ravishing creature," he murmured. "And then, of course, there is her arrogance for challenge. Still, I could wish it were

someone else he was taking to see the Falls."

"It is not really a true falls, such as we see on land, is it?"

"No," he said. "It is actually a current that sweeps over a subterranean cliff, but because it is warm, it remains on the surface like a river and it drives toward the colder sea. It is the cold current coming in beneath it that causes the danger."

The espresso was done and he poured us both cups, careful to leave room for lacing them with cognac. Then, with a fine disregard for confiscated property, he tossed away half a cigar and reached for a fresh one.

"These murders," I said getting back to the story on my mind. "You can't just sit here and do nothing to find the killer. He has burned one woman alive, killed another in a concrete mixer, pulled a third through a harbor suction hose—"

Mario Faldetto looked at me, aggrieved at my lack of understanding. "What would you have me do? We have unearthed no clues," he said.

"Well dammit, you could be looking for some at least, instead of sitting here on your fat backside."

He felt of his rump. "It is getting a bit fleshy," he said. "I will cut out my second after-breakfast coffee."

"For God's sake," I said, "what

are you going to do about this killer?"

He lay back upon his air mattress and crossed his feet. "Ah, that is a question," he said as he exhaled smoke. "I could run up and nose around Genoa, where he hung the girl by her hair over a cliff until she fell to her death. Little by little the hair gave way. It took great imagination. You see, he didn't gather all the hair in a single strand. He spread it out. Very clever indeed."

"Damn the hair! He must have left some clues as to his own identity."

"Possibly," Faldetta admitted. "But supposing that while I am up there he gets busy down here? You see, sooner or later, he must come here, for we have the most attractive women in all of —"

Faldetta broke off and performed a situp without taking his hands from behind his neck. Two more beauties were headed toward the breakwater. He removed his hands from his neck, now, pressed his palms together and made a rotating movement of them against each other. "You see what I mean?" he inquired.

I said, "I think you're letting a dangerous killer run at large with damned little effort to catch him."

"Ah, you impatient Americans," Faldetta murmured. "You must learn the ancient secret of Italy. Everything takes care of itself if you give it time. It will not

be long before this man is identified."

"You mean you've been holding out while my followup stories are withering?"

"Well, not quite. I refer to the fact that he cannot continue to select victims much longer without locking horns with some lover who wants his sweetheart alive."

I stared at him. "And then what happens?"

"Ah, then we will learn who the killer is. Nothing is as reliable as the instinct of a jealous lover who senses another man stealing his right to kill the girl he loves."

"And you are counting on *that* to solve the case?"

"Can you think of something better?" Faldetta asked. Then his thoughts changed with that lightning rapidity of his. "So, here comes Ricco, king of the natural lung divers, and a man who can tell you first hand of the treachery of the Sea Falls."

He lifted his voice and sang out at a figure moving along the edge of the sea line. Sullenly, it seemed to me, the man looked our way, and then grudgingly came toward us.

He was a man the sight of whom sent shivers through me, bandy-legged, overarmed, without grace of movement, with muscle like clots of wire cable and the face of a primitive, seething in secret fury. He nodded, glared at me a moment, then sank to his

haunches and accepted a cup of espresso and cognac.

"I have just been saying," Faldetta said, "that you have personal experience of the Sea Falls in the Rose Grotto."

Ricco gave a blast of breath, which might have been a laugh, or a snarl. "I have been behind the falls," he said, "and three men wearing tanks watched me fighting the whirlpool and could do nothing to free me. The current is like a glass wall, but the undertow, the whirlpool, is worse."

He looked at his gnarled but powerful diver's hands, and then at his tanned feet with the flesh under the toenails the purple-white of men who spend overmuch time in the water.

"Divers, good divers," he said, "have been trapped in there with scuba and not been able to get out."

"You were lung diving?" Faldetta prodded.

Ricco nodded. "I was lucky. If I'd had air, I would have taken time to try and think, and there is nothing you can think. The whirlpool is vertical. You are tossed like a shirt in a washing machine. Only at slack tide is it safe, and then only for perhaps five or ten minutes."

"Ricco," Faldetta said to me, "can take in oxygen enough for six or seven minutes. But that day, you lasted longer, eh Ricco?"

"No, I did not last. I drowned,"

Ricco said. He crossed himself. "I was drowned dead when they pulled me back out of the grotto. They pumped water out of my lungs for a solid hour. The Virgin Mother was kind. She returned life to me, but I was already dead."

He spoke in a low monotone and his eyes smoldered with the memory. I could feel the short hairs on my neck hackle and twitch. He was a man who lived in the shadows of the deep, and the rocks and cold currents and lurking dangers of the deeps had moulded his emotions.

"It is an experience you will not forget, eh?" Faldetta said.

"No, I will not forget. I have been caught by the giant squid and I have been held prisoner and whipped with the barbed tail of the big mantua, but it is the trap of the Sea Falls that I would wish upon an enemy."

My body gave an impulsive jerk at his tone. I reached for cognac, a straight one.

"This gentleman is an American journalist," Faldetta said conversationally to Ricco. "Perhaps some day you will show him the Falls."

Ricco nodded. "If he wants to feel death, I will take him."

"Oh come, it is not that bad," Faldetta said. "I understand that the Golden Adonis has been there several times."

Ricco looked off toward the high tossing surf beyond the

breakwater. "A fool," he said, "who plays at being a mullet. But I, who am like the shark, know its danger."

Faldetta shrugged. "He would not agree. He says it is quite safe from the front and in the warm stream. He is even taking the contessa to see it at turntide today."

"At turntide?" Ricco repeated. And then he asked, "The Contessa Lisi?"

Faldetta waved his cigar apologetically. "I suppose I should not have mentioned that. You have had a little falling out lately, I understand."

"She is a donkey!" Ricco rasped with heat. "A woman with her nose so high that she cannot see her feet. If she is dazzled by this pretty boy, she has got what she deserves."

He looked at his strong diver's hands. The tension was so strong it pulled his knuckles white. After a moment, he said, "If she goes with him, she will be killed and it will serve her right."

Ricco lifted himself from his haunches and rolled his shoulders. Muscles rippled down his arms and torso like the travelling of a tidal wave. "She will get her thrill all right at turntide." He grinned suddenly, but it was the grin a man sees in a nightmare.

He nodded briefly and moved away, his feet padding the sands as if sculling him through water.

I said pointedly, "I imagine he

could be bad trouble under water."

"I would prefer the barbed tail mantua myself," Faldetta said, smiling grimly. "I thought I might get a rise out of him with that information, but it looks as if he half hopes that Lisi will get in trouble. You see, she thought she could buy him like a beach bum and toss him off. Ricco is poor, but he comes of a family as old as hers, and it was a severe blow to his pride."

"Well, I said cynically, "at least I'll get a story out of this if there is another death. Maybe I can twist it to make it appear that this phantom killer hides down there behind the Sea Falls."

Faldetta spread his hands. "The depths to which a journalist will go for a story! But here the morning has almost slipped away and I have forgotten what I meant to tell you."

"So you *have* a clue?" I said enthusiastically.

"Much better. I have two young signorinas from Naples whom we have promised to take to Romulo's for fresh squingelli this noon. They may, I must admit, interfere with our complete dedication to the luncheon. But then —"

Faldetta picked up a chicken thigh and bit into it with a positively sensual voraciousness.

The chicks from Naples were all that he implied, but something more interfered with my complete



appreciation of the squingelli. The more I thought about it, the surer I became that Faldetta had purposely pitted Ricco and the Golden Adonis against each other, using the contessa for bait. I felt that in some way, he had purposely engineered this afternoon's diving party, and then had made a point of tipping Ricco off.

Faldetta had a mysterious way of knowing things, often without a wisp of evidence. I decided that he knew that one or the other of the two men was the phantom killer, and had arranged to let one trap the other in the act, even if it meant endangering the contessa's life.

After all, he would philosophize, she would have been murdered anyway and to no one's good. This way, scores, perhaps hundreds, of curvaceous cuties

would be saved from a maniac so enraged at womanhood that he would not even afford them a last pleasure before death.

I thought of which man it would be and had no difficulty settling upon Ricco, the sinister, the sullen, the secret, whose emotions were attuned to the cruelty of the shadowed depths. I wondered if the Adonis could handle him as he rushed from some underwater lair upon the unsuspecting couple. That, however, would scarcely matter to Faldetta. Two deaths would simply be more conclusive than one, and there was at least a chance that the contessa would escape during the attack.

I was champing at the bit, therefore, as the clock crawled past four, the hour of turntide. But Faldetta remained unaware of my agitation, dividing his attention, in equal parts, between the two bounding beauties from Naples, and an oversized Napoleon pastry, which would help him endure the privation of waiting until dinner to dine again.

By five after four, I was ready to yell at him. By ten after, I could not have raised strength to whisper. Obviously, all of my fanciful anticipation had been precisely that. He had not plotted the triangle, nor instigated the dive, and it was unimportant to him.

When he suggested that it was now cool enough to enjoy a drive and that we might all take a sun-

down swim at some more secluded area where the girls would not need bikinis, I went along from sheer lack of will to resist.

We drove north, toward the limestone Capes, and Captain Faldetta pointed out the location of various famous grottos. The Blue, the Nile, the Rose, the Garden. He named each in turn, his voice vivacious and tinged with nostalgia.

"We might just stop on the beach outside the Rose," he said. "At this hour of the day, the light bounces from the cliffs onto the open sea much the same as inside."

Faldetta paused to give a little pinch to the girl pressed against him like seaweed to a rock. He was rewarded with a squeal, smiled with boyish delight and turned his Ferrari toward the beach. Rounding a cornice of up-thrusting red rock, I blinked and sat up sharply.

Others were there before us, including an ambulance, two police cars and four police frogmen in gear, but still dry. A girl, whom I eventually identified as the Contessa Lisa from her limbs, thrashed on the sands and cried out hysterically while a doctor administered a hypodermic.

As the tranquilizer took effect, Lisa calmed enough to make the frenzied picture on her mind clear. With the Golden Adonis, she had swum into the grotto at quiet of

tide. The outgoing current had been warm and strong and it had been necessary to swim against it to the sides, using handholds on the rocks. But at the falls, they had found a backwater from where they could watch the play of rose-colored light upon the rocks behind the current, and marvel at the strangely waterfalls effect.

They floated there, soaking the beautiful scene in, and she had barely been conscious of the suddenly incoming tide forming a counter current beneath her. It had now been much easier to hold their position. They had moved forward, nearer the falls, but keeping well off to the side of the main force of the warm current.

Suddenly, some bulge in the current under her had clutched her and sucked her down and forward, behind the falls. Then she had realized she was caught and churning within a circling current behind the falls, trapped as behind heavy glass, even though she could see through.

She had panicked, and lost her mouthpiece, instinctively crying out to the Adonis. Her lungs had nearly filled with water while that vertical whirlpool tossed her in its vortex. Then she regained her mouthpiece as she completed the current's circle and could look through the falls again. What she saw was two men locked in struggle.

Suddenly, one of them had darted free and porpoised beneath the falls and come up beside her. How, she did not know. But at a point he had whipped her violently forward, and she had been seized by the warm current and carried toward the grotto mouth.

"Which one saved you?" Faldetta asked.

Lisa looked up at him with the tranquilizer's strange lack of disturbance. "I don't know," she said. Her lips closed, snapped open, fluttered, closed again. Like a pricked balloon, her taut body suddenly relaxed.

The doctor nodded meaningly. An interne brought a blanket, and the frogmen placed her on a stretcher and in the ambulance.

"Well," Faldetta said enthusiastically, "that worked very nicely, and she was not even murdered! All we have to do now is wait to see which one it was."

He glanced at his watch. It was four-forty-eight. "Would you say there was sixty minutes air in tanks such as she wore?" he asked the frogmen.

"That is maximum," the chief frog said. Under his upthrust mask, his seamed face showed worry. "The contessa and the Adonis dove in at ten to four," he continued. "Ricco must have already been in there, but of course he could lie on the surface at dead low tide. Still, both their tanks must be out by now. Maybe they

both got caught behind those damned falls."

Faldetta reached in his car pocket for a candy bar and wolfed it, then lighted a fresh cigar and leaned there patiently. "Let us give them time to die in peace," he murmured piously.

Nobody said another word. Except for the hiss of the incoming tide across the sands, it was almost as if I could hear his watch tick. Four-fifty, fifty-one, fifty-three, fifty-five. It was on the dot of five that a diver suddenly arose from the water beyond the grotto mouth, sank back, rolled on his back and after a moment's rest, began sculling toward shore, his mouthpiece dragging in the water by his shoulder. Frogmen went in waist deep to help him.

It was Ricco, his lungs working like bellows, the veins still high and black upon his neck and temples from lack of air.

"I take it you could not save him," Faldetta remarked with cheerful ire.

Ricco nodded at the grotto. "He is in there behind the waterfalls. But his tanks are quite gone."

Faldetta noted the time accurately. "Yes, of course. You would have measured by your own tanks, and come out on your lungs. Well, you tried."

"The contessa—Lisi?" Ricco asked.

"She is quite all right. I will make sure she knows who saved

her. He shoved her into the tidal current, of course?"

"I was slow, but I wanted to be sure," Ricco said.

"And then, of course, sure of his ultimate fate too." Faldetta nodded. "I do not imagine he enjoyed the last forty minutes of his life."

"I do not think he did," Ricco agreed.

The two looked straight into each other's eyes and understood. Ricco accepted a slug of cognac, shucked out of his tanks and weights and flippers, and got into the ambulance with the exhausted contessa.

Mario Faldetta clapped his hands, pinched both girls, beamed happily, and looked at me. "It all comes out like the fairy tale, yes? You have your story, Ricco has won his contessa, I can close the phantom murders at no cost to the government. And now there is a little place just thirty minutes up the coast where we can enjoy some fine vino and dinner, and relax in privacy."

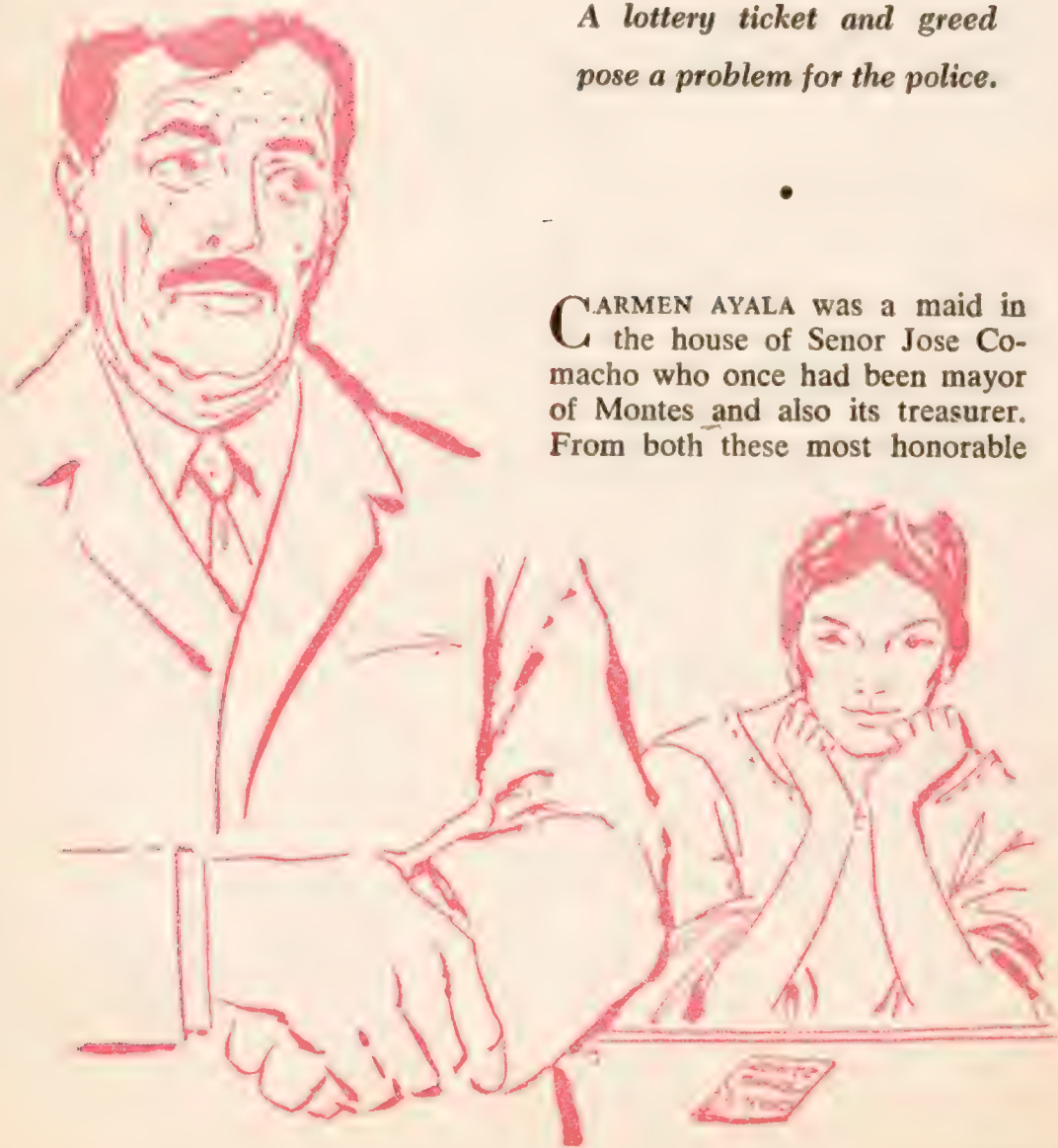
We got back in the Ferrari and Captain Faldetta started with a roar, then let it idle to turn to me. "A solid man, Ricco," he said approvingly. "He waited a full six minutes after Adonis' tanks had given out to make sure he was dead. A very thorough man. Perhaps he will fetch me some deep muscles and snails one of these days."

JUSTICE SERVED

by HAL ELLSON

*A lottery ticket and greed
pose a problem for the police.*

CARMEN AYALA was a maid in the house of Senor Jose Comacho who once had been mayor of Montes and also its treasurer. From both these most honorable



offices Senor Comacho had managed to milk the city of fabulous sums. A greedy man, yes, but no different from most of his predecessors who retired as soon as they left office.

But poor Carmen. She was born on the other side of the Santa Caterina river in an unpainted shack. Her father had drunk himself to death, and her mother became a beggar to support her children, four hungry boys and Carmen. The boys helped out by shining shoes in the main plaza of the city, while Carmen sold Chiclets. None of them had ever worn shoes, or attended school. A horrible existence, but only the mother was aware of this.

At fourteen and thin as a stick, Carmen became a maid in the home of Senor Comacho. In two years time she filled out so attractively that young men and older ones looked at her with longing. But she had eyes for no one, and no thoughts except for her work. A shy pretty girl, but woefully ignorant, for she could neither read nor write.

At eighteen she bought her first lottery ticket and won a small sum of money. She did not know this till she showed her receipt to a friend. That was the beginning. After that, she continued to buy tickets regularly, thinking she'd become rich—a delusion that most of the population of Montes shared with her. There were no more win-

ning tickets for her, but that didn't matter. Sooner or later, she knew, her number would come up.

Two years went by and nothing happened. She had taken to giving her receipts to Senor Comacho and it was he who checked the winning numbers chalked in the gutter before a restaurant fronting the main plaza. An odd arrangement? Not really, for Senor Comacho also was addicted to the lottery—not that he needed the money, but he was greedy and wanted more.

Now Senor Comacho's touchstone was a blind man who hawked his tickets at the main door of the Cathedral. He was ragged, dirty, evil-tempered and gave everyone the impression that it was a privilege to purchase his tickets. A rather dubious stance, but Senor Comacho swore by him, in spite of the fact that the blind man had brought him no good luck to speak of.

On her part, Carmen purchased her tickets at random. Seeing no sense to this, one day Senor Comacho suggested that she purchase her tickets from the blind man. Carmen merely shrugged. There was no advantage, as far as she could see, but Senor Comacho insisted that the blind man brought luck.

"Did he ever bring you any?" Carmen asked blandly.

"Not very much—as yet," Senor Comacho replied. "But a big

winner is due from him. I've felt it for some time now."

"Enough to make one rich?" said Carmen.

"Oh, yes. Quite rich."

This was sufficient. From that day on, Carmen bought her lottery tickets from the blind man who, as it happened, wasn't blind at all.

Months passed and nothing happened, then, Senor Comacho's prediction came to pass in a most dramatic fashion. Stepping from the plaza restaurant one morning, he paused to check the lottery winners chalked in the gutter and his eyes protruded at sight of the first number. There it was, second prize in the lottery. His whole body trembled as he checked the receipt in his hand.

Fifty-thousand pesos! But it was not for him. The receipt belonged to Carmen Ayala. For a moment he succumbed to bitterness and frustration, then anger took over. After all, he himself had suggested that Carmen buy her tickets from the blind man—with a result so unanticipated that it hardly seemed justified.

It was but a short step to his next thought—that the winning number was really his. Greed overcame his conscience, of which he had little, while circumstance permitted him to take the final step. Poor ignorant Carmen. He pocketed her receipt and went off to collect the fifty thousand pesos. Returning home, he called Car-

men and told her of his good fortune.

"Too bad it wasn't you who won," he added, handing her his own receipt. Then, to ease his conscience, he gave her fifty pesos and allowed her the rest of the day off.

Suspecting nothing and overjoyed with her good fortune, Carmen left immediately. But she didn't go home. There was a dress shop in the main plaza, and she started for it. On the way, she stopped before the restaurant where the winning lottery numbers were chalked in the gutter. As always, they baffled her. But a man stood at the curb and she turned to him for help.

A glance at her receipt, another at the numbers and the man cried, "Senorita, you are rich. You have won the grand prize—a hundred thousand pesos!"

It took some moments for Carmen to realize what had happened. Then, with a cry, she ran off to collect the money.

The next day she did not appear at Senor Comacho's house, for she was wealthy now, and the senor could find himself another maid. What he found was in the newspaper that morning—a photograph of Carmen Ayala, winner of the lottery's grand prize.

Senor Comacho turned pale and sickened. With his own ticket the girl had done this.

Now another man might have accepted this unhappy turn of

events as his just deserts, but not Senor Comacho. His greed was too much, and off he marched to police headquarters at the Municipal building. To the captain sitting at the desk, he demanded to see the chief of police.

"Busy," said the captain, but he changed his tune and came alert when Comacho explained his visit.

"One moment, Senor." He lifted the phone, spoke to the chief, nodded, then turned to Comacho. "The chief is waiting. Go right up, Senor."

Senor Comacho stalked out, passed under a shadowed arcade, went through a dim passage into a patio and mounted an iron stairway to the balcony where the chief of police dispensed orders and ruled his little force with an iron hand.

Comacho knocked on the chief's door and was invited to enter. Chief Lopez greeted him with a nod, told him to sit down and tell his story. Senor Comacho cleared his throat and came quickly to the point, explaining that one Carmen Ayala, a maid in his employ, had, by switching receipts—hers for his own—claimed and collected the grand prize in yesterday's lottery.

Chief Lopez nodded. "A very serious charge." He turned to a short heavyset man sitting on the other side of the room—Detective Victor Fiala.

"Pick up Carmen Ayala," Lopez said, turning back to Senor

Comacho and offering him a cigarette from his gold case.

Meantime Fiala arose and went to the door. About to open it, he stopped his hand and turned. "Excuse me, Senor."

Comacho looked around, brows lifted. "Yes, what is it?"

"If I'm not mistaken, you won fifty thousand pesos in the lottery yesterday."

"That is true, but it was with Sneorita Ayala's receipt, the one she passed on to me."

"The two of you with winning tickets. That could happen perhaps once in a million times. Truly a miracle."

"Well, yesterday it happened," Senor Comacho answered tartly. "And the girl duped me."

An absent-minded look on his face, Fiala nodded and went out the door. A half hour later he was back with Carmen Ayala. The girl was upset and frightened.

Chief Lopez asked Senor Comacho to please wait outside and turned to Carmen who had begun to weep. Frowning, he tapped his desk and said, "Compose yourself, Senorita." As soon as she seemed a little more in control of herself he informed her of the charge Senor Comacho had made.

This only brought more tears but, for once Lopez was patient. He waited and finally she lifted her face. Her eyes, he noted, were like a fawn's, bright and innocent. Disturbed, he said, "Now, Seno-

rita, if you will please tell me your side of the story."

Carmen's lips trembled, but she managed to repeat what she had already told Detective Fiala—that Senor Comacho always held her lottery receipts for the simple reason that she had never gone to school and did not understand numbers. Only once in the past had she won a small amount wholly by accident.

Then, yesterday, as usual, he gave her back her receipt, telling her it was worthless. He also gave her fifty pesos and the day off. With the fifty pesos, she had gone to buy a dress. On the way to the shop, she noticed the lottery numbers in the plaza and showed her receipt to a man who told her that she had won first prize.

"And you didn't change receipts with Senor Comacho?" Lopez asked.

"How could I?" Carmen answered. "He had both of them. Later, he gave me one and—"

Lopez raised his hand. "All right, that's enough. If you will wait outside, Senorita."

When the door closed behind her, Lopez looked at Fiala and said, "Well, what do you think? How would you handle this?"

A deep vertical line creased Fiala's bronzed forehead. Slowly he plucked at his lower lip. "You really wish to know how I think justice would be served in this case?" he asked.

"I'm asking your opinion."

As soon as Fiala had heard Carmen's story he had known what he would do. But now he hesitated, as if giving considerable thought to the matter. Finally he leaned forward and began to speak. When he was done, Lopez smiled and said, "Exactly the way I intended to handle the matter. You can let them come in now."

Fiala arose and opened the door. Still frightened and ready to break into tears again, Carmen Ayala stepped into the office, followed by Senor Comacho. When they stood before his desk, Lopez surveyed both as if each were equally guilty, then lit a cigarette. That done, his eyes suddenly brightened and he gazed steadily at Senor Comacho.

"I have weighed both sides of this case, Senor," he began, "and I find your side wanting. It is my opinion that you deceived this girl."

"But surely—"

"Quiet, Senor. When the lottery number was announced, which showed that the Senorita had won second prize, you were overcome by greed and claimed it as your own by taking her receipt and giving her yours. However, it so happened that you yourself actually possessed the receipt for the grand prize, a fact which you were unaware of until this morning.

"When you discovered your error, you attempted to rectify it by

accusing the senorita of the very crime which you committed against her. So now, Senor Comacho, the fifty thousand pesos claimed by you are to be returned to the senorita. Furthermore, the one hundred thousand pesos go to the senorita."

"But it was I who won the grand prize," Comacho protested.

"I know," Lopez said with a smile, "but, you see, you willingly gave her your receipt. She did not steal it from you. Therefore, the

money rightfully belongs to her. Now you have exactly thirty minutes to return the pesos."

Pale and haggard Comacho nodded and started for the door.

"Exactly thirty minutes," Lopez said after him.

The door closed and Lopez turned to Senorita Ayala. He asked her to be seated, then looked at Fiala, winked and said, "I have a feeling that justice has been served. Do you agree?"

"Ai," said Fiala. "I agree."

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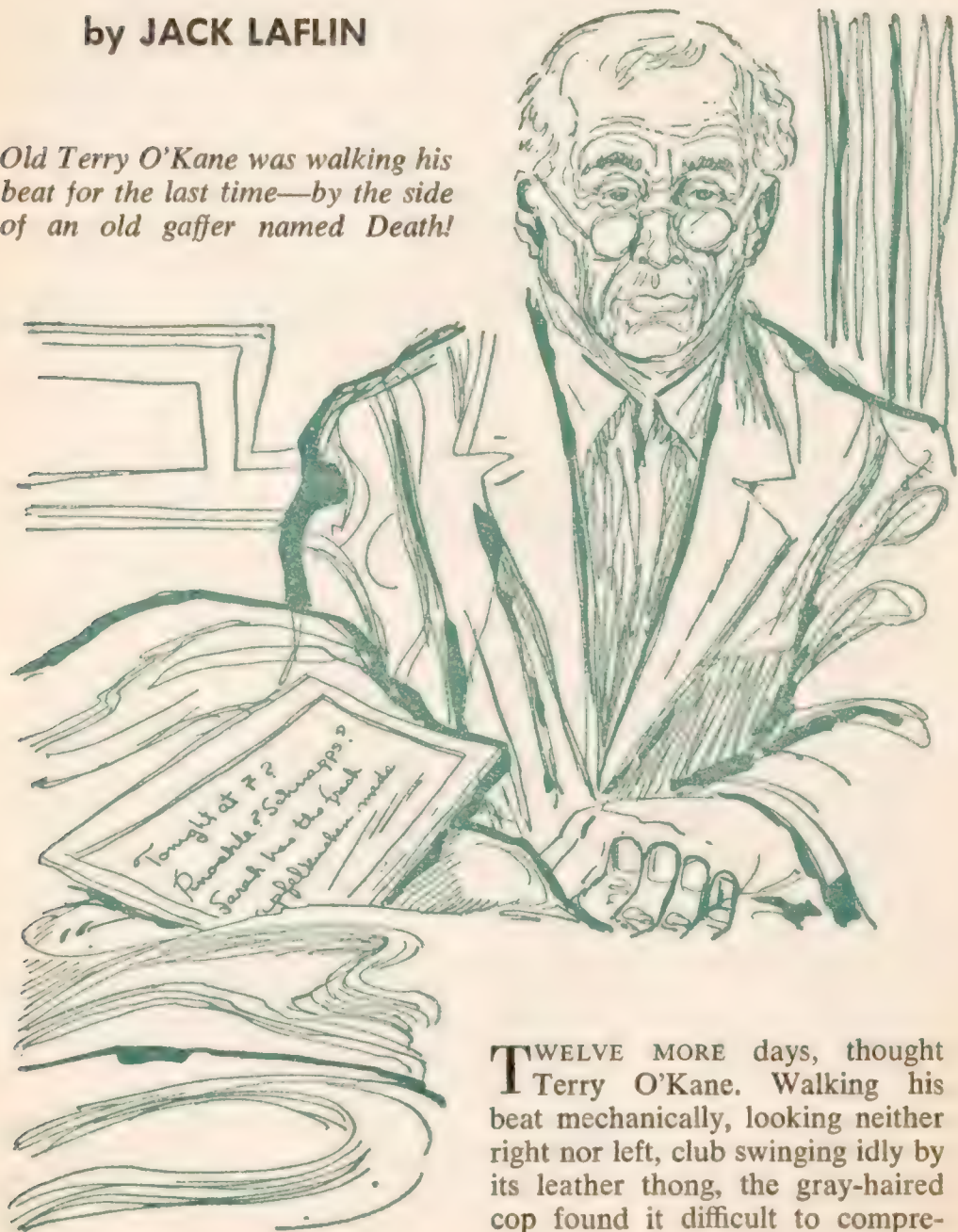
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O'KANE WAS ABLE

by JACK LAFLIN

Old Terry O'Kane was walking his beat for the last time—by the side of an old gaffer named Death!



TWELVE MORE days, thought Terry O'Kane. Walking his beat mechanically, looking neither right nor left, club swinging idly by its leather thong, the gray-haired cop found it difficult to compre-

hend that thirty years on the force would be over in less than two weeks. As though in a dream from which he wished he would awaken, he remembered having signed the retirement papers, pushed them across to Captain Newman, then gone to his locker to change for the eight-to-four tour.

After all, he reflected, I *am* just on the sunny side of sixty. Not that that means anything, he rebuked himself angrily. I'm just as good a cop and a man as I ever was! Maybe a trifle slower and heavier, but four departmental citations in the past ten years prove nobody *pushed* me onto the scrap heap. The fur heist. The narcotics stake-out. The beered-up juvenile with the knife. The two muggers.

He sighed, admitting despite his earlier appraisal that each successive bit of action, each unlimbering of the service revolver, each giving of himself in defense of the public he had sworn to protect took a heavier toll.

"*Buon giorno*, Offic' O'Kane," Nick Matteo sang out from the curb, polishing an apple on his ragged sleeve.

For twenty-two years, as long as O'Kane had covered the territory, the ritual had been the same. A cheery greeting from the old Italian pushcart man. A warm smile underneath the ferocious white handlebar moustache that seemed to defy poverty, a troubled life, encroaching age. Then, always the

shining of the fruit and finally, the actual presentation.

It was, O'Kane knew, a small gesture of friendship in itself; one, however, which had much larger overtones. It represented the esteem in which the people of his district held him. High and low, old and young, Italian, Jewish or Irish the majority of residents surrounding the 129th precinct knew and respected Terence O'Kane.

"How's tricks, Nick?" O'Kane inquired, biting deep into the juicy redness of the Northern Spy.

"All right, if they don't get no worse. I'm seventy-eight and still push a cart, *molte grazie al Buon Dio*." Matteo crossed himself hurriedly. "Mama been sick, but she's better now. My oldest son, Dom, he jus' become grandfather again. Everybody fine, all twelve of 'em."

"Glad to hear it," said O'Kane indistinctly, his mouth full of apple.

"Only one problem, Offic' O'Kane."

"Yeah, what's that, Nick?"

"Th' lousy Russell Street Dukes."

"Again?"

"Again, still, who know? Las' night, Charley Monk and Peanuts Gambrell, they get wise with Carmela, my son Bernie's daughter. She came over to see how Mama's gettin' along. They call her all kinds of names, start pawing her right on the stoop. They finally get tired of it and scram. Then, earlier

today, they come runnin' by and swipe a coupla bucks worth of fruit. Nearly tip the cart over. You gotta do something about th' kids before it's too late."

A shadow crossed O'Kane's face. His previous evaluation of the relationship existing between him and the dwellers on his beat had not been quite accurate. It certainly didn't extend to members of the Dukes, a gang of unhappy, disoriented, misfit delinquents who brawled, rumbled, stole and wenched their way through Russell Street, the heart of his daily patrol.

That rabble, he thought contemptuously. Listen to no one, ready to spit on everything and everybody decent. I've done what I can with them, their leader Monk and his buddy Gambrell and all the rest—it's just no dice. They're chronic cop-haters, people-haters, world-haters, and there's only one end any of 'em'll probably come to.

To Nick Matteo, he said, with a shrug, "I'll have a few words with the bums, for all the good it'll do. If I run them in, they'll only be on the street again in a matter of hours, because the juvenile courts are full of important stuff, and the social workers can't handle their case loads now. You understand, don't you, Nick? That there's so much one man can do, with a whole beat to cover, and no more?"

"I guess so." The fruit ped-

dler's face clouded in hurt surprise; then he grinned. "I know you a long time, Offic' O'Kane. Whatever you say, it's okay by me."

"Well, I've got to be running, Nick. It's time for me to check in. After that I'm going to stop off at Pop Mandelbaum's. *A rivederci*."

"*A rivederc*'."

Walking to the call box at the corner of Seventeenth and Russell, O'Kane hated himself for what he had just done, as well as what he would do in the next twelve days. He had lied to Nick Matteo, and the knowledge distressed him. He knew full well he wasn't about to lecture Charley Monk and Peanuts Gambrell over some indecent remarks addressed to Matteo's granddaughter, the theft of a few bananas or anything else.

Both young hoodlums were sixteen, quick and adroit already with zip gun and switchblade. He had tangled with them on one prior occasion, a year and a half before, and had handled them. They were, he reflected, an anti-social pair of animals who fronted for a gang little, if any, better. After their last brush, they had sworn to get him, sooner or later.

Idle threat or not, what man in his right mind would open that can of worms with only twelve days to go until his retirement became effective? Anybody who rocked the boat under such circumstances was just plain nuts!

His footsteps slowed as he ap-

proached the call box, key in hand. Ah, Terence, it's out in the open at last! he told himself viciously. No more excuses, no more beating around the bush. Face the truth. You're getting old and afraid, to let a lousy pension come between you and your duty!

O'Kane sighed again. Fear was an emotion alien to his nature, yet he was smart enough to admit it gripped him now. The captain, the lieutenant, the sergeant, none of them knew that he was losing the sight of one eye, and what the hell good was a harness bull walking his beat half blind? He had told no one, consulted no one, not even his wife, Emily.

He had simply put in his papers, and that was that. Emily faced problems of her own, a bad heart, arthritis; she didn't need any additional burdens. After I'm off the force, he thought, there may be enough dough on hand to purchase a small candy store or newsstand, run it, and let the rest of the world roll by.

It galled him, what he was doing. But then, what *was* a man to do? Grit his teeth, O'Kane guessed, stretch a point, and view outright timidity as necessary prudence. Childless, ill, aging, Emily needed him sorely and would probably come to lean on him even more as the inexorable years slipped by.

No, there was no other way. Despite the disgust he felt at himself, O'Kane knew that his succes-

sor on Russell Street would have to deal with Charley Monk and Peanuts Gambrell. He refused to make it his headache any longer, not with twelve days to go on the force.

O'Kane inserted his key, making his hourly report to Sergeant Little. He turned the corner, shuffling a trifle, steps less springy, their resiliency lost with his own self-esteem.

Halfway down the block, he paused in front of the dingy shop with the plate glass window bearing the faded legend: *LEVI MANDELBAUM. EXPERT TAILOR. YOU BRING—I SEW.*

Everybody on Russell Street was acquainted with Pop Mandelbaum. Rumors about him were as numerous as swirling bits of paper on the dirty thoroughfares of the 129th. He had been rich in the old country, people said, having made a fortune off members of his own race, smuggling them out of Nazi Germany after Hitler came to power. He was a wealthy miser, the refrain ran, cutting and stitching all day and half the night without spending a cent.

O'Kane had been a friend of Mandelbaum's for two decades. Discounting gossip and hearsay, the cop knew the truth, for the simple reason Pop Mandelbaum had told him, and O'Kane believed.

Yes, Mandelbaum had written it down, slowly and laboriously, in

his cramped, turn-of-the-century, Old World script, both on paper and the small slate he kept in the rear of his shop.

For the elderly tailor was deaf and dumb, larynx crushed and ear drums punctured in the course of a Gestapo 'interrogation,' when he had refused to betray the hiding place of a certain Jewish underground leader the Nazis wanted very badly to lay their hands on.

After that had come in turn labor battalions, concentration camps, slaughter of close relatives, for some mysterious reason release, finally escape to America with his wife, Sarah.

Poor, afflicted, member of a racial group with an age-old history of persecution, Mandelbaum symbolized to O'Kane the very epitome of the officer's Russell Street flock—a small, handicapped citizen struggling for bare survival in a world much too large and complex for him.

O'Kane pushed open the door and entered, wrinkling his nostrils as he always did at the musty odor of cloth and mildew. In the watery winter sunlight, the cop caught sight of the tailor behind his table, industriously sewing a pair of coat lapels.

The glow filtering through the front window shone fitfully on the pink expanse of skull with its thin halo of white hair, glinted off the cheap glasses, highlighted the lines and seams of a face constantly

touched, but never permanently scarred, by adversity. How old can he be? wondered O'Kane. Seventy-five? Eighty? Not that it really mattered; all that counted in taking the measure of a man was friendship, and this commodity O'Kane felt certain he enjoyed in abundance. Had, in fact, for better than twenty years.

Alerted by the shadow his visitor cast, Pop Mandelbaum looked up from his work. A smile creased his countenance, the hand holding needle and thread rose in airy greeting. He nodded toward the slate and chalk, which O'Kane handed him. Nimble fingers flew. The officer read:

"Tonight at 7? Pinochle? Schnapps? Sarah has the fresh Apfelkuchen made."

O'Kane nodded, grinning over the crabbed, precise writing, the European '7' with its transverse bar, the oddly Teutonic sentence structure. He looked forward to Tuesdays with Mandelbaum, since his own wife, Emily, usually visited her sister those nights. Cards, brandy, companionship, and Sarah's melt-in-the-mouth pastry. When a man starts getting up there in years, it doesn't take very much to keep him happy!

Pop erased what he had written, busied himself once more with the chalk. He held up the slate.

"How the plan for retirement goes?"

The corners of O'Kane's mouth

slanted downward, and he shook his head slowly. Like a spectator at a Roman circus decreeing death to a gladiator who had fought poorly, the cop jabbed his thumb several times toward the floor. All his inner feelings about leaving the force—and the manner of his departure—were summed up in the single negative gesture.

Mandelbaum, in his turn, sighed and bent his head, realizing the turmoil that must be racing through his friend's mind.

To make their date firm, O'Kane pointed to his watch, held up five fingers of one hand plus two of the other, snapped off a salute, regained the sidewalk. He had a beat to patrol, at least for twelve more days. . . .

At ten minutes to seven that night, in civies, O'Kane stood outside Pop Mandelbaum's shop. Surprise, then worry began to surge through him. Darkness pervaded the premises; a tentative rattle of the doorknob had told him it was locked.

"What the hell," said O'Kane softly. "How does he expect me to get in? And he always leaves a light on Tuesday nights."

Pop and Sarah lived in a tiny apartment over the tailoring establishment; to reach it one went through a door at the rear and then climbed a steep flight of stairs.

Puzzled, he reached out to try again a knob which common sense told him would be as unyielding

the second time as the first. Then O'Kane caught sight of the slate.

It was propped against the inner surface of the plate glass window, a tiny, almost invisible dark smudge. If it were there, it followed, it contained a message for him. But in the name of heaven, why?

The street light stanchion was forty feet away, at the intersection. O'Kane cursed the drab dinginess of his district. Dredging a lighter from his pocket, he stooped, spun the wheel, cupped his hands around the slender orange flame flickering in the bitter December wind. With difficulty, through the dust-smear window, he read:

"To visit friends on 27th Street we have gone. Sorry about Pinochle. Levi."

O'Kane shook his head in wonderment. It wasn't like Pop to skip out on one of their Tuesday night games. Exasperated, a vague sentiment of dread tugging at him, the graying officer strode away from the shop, his shoe soles echoing mournfully against the littered concrete.

He hadn't taken more than a few steps when the formless fear he felt began to assume a definite shape of alarm, a sense that something was drastically out of place in the total picture. Yet, when he groped for it, it mockingly eluded him.

O'Kane stood still, trying to think. It was akin to viewing a

beautifully-painted oil containing a hidden flaw; it was there, if one could but find it. He examined the situation from every conceivable angle, working with the known facts, still getting nowhere. Pop. Sarah. Pinochle. Schnapps. Visiting friends on 27th Street instead. Who the hell did Mandelbaum know in that section of town? Why, it was clean over on the other side of—

Suddenly, he saw it. Obscured amid a dozen more salient details, they had been small things, to be sure. Nonetheless, they didn't belong there. Invisible to an unpracticed eye, from O'Kane's long association with the tailor they told much. In short, Pop had to be in trouble!

Starting back toward the shop, O'Kane hesitated. The memory of his lie to Nick Matteo returned, stronger, more accusing than ever. He recalled the reasoning behind it, his reluctance to do more than walk his tours and count the days remaining, his determination to avoid danger at any cost, his present and future responsibilities to Emily.

But those concepts were in direct conflict with another problem. Was he to turn his back on Pop Mandelbaum, who also needed him at this very moment?

It was an agonizing decision, one O'Kane realized he didn't have much time to resolve. Within a few seconds, he knew the an-

swer. O'Kane was a man who didn't confer lightly on fellow humans the mantle of friendship. However, once given, he considered it inviolate.

O'Kane eased the .38 out of its hip holster, cradled it in his right hand. He had no idea what he might find upstairs, but it paid to be prepared. Walking lightly, he retraced his steps, shot a quick look above the shop, caught sight of something he had failed to notice previously: a thin rectangle of light spilling out around the edges of the apartment window.

It wasn't conclusive, of course, but it helped buttress O'Kane's mounting suspicions. Pop was a frugal soul who worked long hours for short money. It wouldn't be like him, nor Sarah, to leave the place and neglect to turn off the electricity.

Gingerly, making no unnecessary noise, O'Kane tried various keys in the lock of Mandelbaum's door. A cheap, loose, rattly, assembly-line-made product, it soon yielded to a skeleton key. The cop eased the door open.

Inside, he listened for a moment. Hearing no sound, he crossed to the rear of the single room, past the pipe clothes rack and Pop's work table, to the other door leading to the living quarters above. Despite the gloom, O'Kane's familiarity with the layout allowed him to move silently.

Carefully, a few inches at a

time, he ascended the stairs, drawing in his breath as a loose board emitted a protesting squeak under his weight. Upward, one riser at a time, he tiptoed until he was planted by the second, inner portal, the one to the apartment itself. Placing an ear against the panels, he heard faint sounds, an unintelligible gabble of low-pitched voices.

Retreating downward a few paces, O'Kane steeled himself, then leaped forward and drove a muscular shoulder against the ancient wood.

Hurtling inside the small living room amid a shower of splinters, then righting himself, bracing his legs wide apart O'Kane stared in fascinated horror at a scene that might have been professionally posed for a mystery magazine illustration.

Except it wasn't.

This tableau was disgustingly live, and in full color!

Pop and Sarah Mandelbaum, bound tightly and gagged with adhesive tape, sat side by side on the sagging sofa, their eyes dilated with fear and suddenly something else—the incredibly dramatic swiftness of their deliverance. A thin trickle of blood coursed down over Pop's face from a scalp gash, staining his shirt.

The room had been systematically ransacked, vandalized, pulled apart a little at a time. Everything was in disorder, rugs kicked back, curtains ruthlessly torn

down, lamps overturned, coffee table smashed.

To O'Kane's left, face and unruly mop of black hair sweat-soaked, stood Charley Monk, in the act of hacking at an overstuffed chair with a saw-toothed switchblade knife. To the cop's right, over near the wall, holding a zip gun, the raised scar on his cheek livid, was Peanuts Gambrell, lifting a picture by its wire to peer behind it.

O'Kane's precipitate entrance apparently had robbed the two young hoodlums of the power of speech, because for a second, all five actors in the play were silently frozen, a tense group caught by stop-action photography.

Gambrell shattered the stillness first. "Well, well, if it ain't the big Mick," he said with a sneer. For his age, he had an amazingly deep voice. "Come on in. Don't bother to knock or nothin' like that. Join the party. You weren't invited, but we're damn glad to have you. Ain't we, Charley?"

"Yeah, you bet we are. We owe this copper something and we've been a long time paying it. It's gonna be fun."

Fear laid a fleeting icy finger along O'Kane's spine, but he kept it out of his voice.

"You rotten young punks! The chair's too good for the both of you, and that's where you'll wind up—if not for this caper then some other!"

Backing up a step or so to widen his field of vision, attempting to cover the pair simultaneously, O'Kane kept shifting his eyes, waiting for an overt move on the part of either.

"Knock it off, O'Kane," Monk said. "You can't take care of Peanuts and me at the same time, so don't try to be no hero. Drop that piece and get over on the couch with the Mandelbaums. After we've sweated out of the old buzzard where he keeps all that loot he sneaked out of Germany, maybe we'll let you live. Just maybe. Naturally, we'll have to rough you up some, sort of prove you can't mess with the Russell Street Dukes and get away clean. Well, what'll it be? Do you drop it or do we drop you?"

A bead of perspiration lazed down O'Kane's forehead. He was in a bind, and no mistake. The stalemate wouldn't last much longer.

"He's between us, Charley," Peanuts Gambrell called out. "We got him right where we want him. You take him from your side and I'll come at him from mine. Let's quit this gabbing and settle his hash for once and for all. How the hell are we ever going to find out what we want to know with this bull standing there wavin' that cannon at us?"

Monk considered a few seconds. "Yeah, Peanuts, you're right. Let's do just that."

Awaiting their move, trying to anticipate it, O'Kane thought he caught a flash of light from his left. For half a heartbeat, he swung his eyes in that direction. Instinctively, as he caught sight of the switchblade being raised in Monk's hand, preparatory to being thrown, it dawned on him he had committed a grievous error. He swung back



to the right, not quite fast enough. The zip gun made a flat, cracking noise in Gambrell's fist. Its small calibre slug thudded, hammerlike, into O'Kane's chest, high, near the shoulder.

The cop buckled slightly, then completed his turn and triggered off two shots of his own. The first spun Gambrell around, the second took him in the back and flung him against the wall. The youth caromed off, pitching forward, full-length, on the rug, like a puppet whose strings had suddenly been cut.

Seeing his ally thus disposed of, Charley Monk screamed, "Damn you, O'Kane, you lousy, rat fink cop, you!" and launched himself

in a blur of motion toward his enemy. Veteran officer and apprentice criminal met head-on in the middle of the room.

Weakening, losing blood, O'Kane felt the .38 torn from his grasp, saw it go spinning over in the direction of Gambrell's body. Then it was hand-to-hand, man versus teen-ager, a primitive struggle to live.

O'Kane wasted neither time nor sympathy on Charley Monk. Before him danced the combined images of the insults to Nick Matteo's granddaughter, the theft of fruit, the vicious assault on the Mandelbaums, the old-womanly fear Monk and Gambrell had engendered in O'Kane himself.

Grabbing the kid's wrist, just below the switchblade, O'Kane kned him violently in the groin, sank his free fist into Monk's midriff, ended the brief struggle with a crunching right uppercut that exploded squarely on Monk's crag-like chin.

The knife described a lazy, spinning arc in the air, fetching up against the far baseboard. Charley Monk crumpled instantly, lay still, out cold.

O'Kane stood gazing down at the young hood for a brief space of time, breathing heavily, his vision going out of focus, shock and bleeding getting in their lethal work. Then the room began to tilt, and he slid off the edge of it into a deep black pit.

FIVE DAYS LATER, a mending Terry O'Kane stared happily at the noisy shambles of his hospital room. Emily sat by his bed, holding his hand; Captain Newman was there, Lieutenant Regan, the doctor, a newspaper man named Andy Bliss.

"You were taking one hell of a chance, Terry," Regan said, "barging in on those punks like that, less than two weeks before your retirement. The commissioner is pleased. So am I."

O'Kane hid a smile behind a covering hand. If Regan only knew!

"It was smart police work, O'Kane," the captain piped up. "But I still don't see how you got wise. The setup must have looked good, what with Mandelbaum leaving you the message and all. What tipped you he was in a jam?"

Emily plumped the pillow behind O'Kane's head. The grizzled cop sat up a little straighter.

"That was just it, Captain. The message. Pop alerted me himself, with some quick thinking, while Monk and Gambrell were forcing him to write it. They knew about my regular Tuesday night visits, and they didn't want to be disturbed while they worked Pop and Sarah over.

"Of course, he didn't have a penny and still doesn't, but those young thugs listened to the neighborhood rumormongers and fig-

ured it to be a soft touch. Here, give me a piece of paper and a pencil and I'll show you what I mean. You fellows are all familiar with Mandelbaum, aren't you?"

There were nods around the room.

"Then you know he's originally from Germany, and used to writing European style. When I talked to him earlier that day, setting up our pinochle and schnapps date, he put down the figure seven using the European transverse bar.

"Like a capital 'F,' see what I mean? As long as I've known Pop, that's the *only* way he ever wrote it. Then, in the evening, when I came to the shop, found it deserted, and read the slate, I began to wonder. I smelled something out of line, but couldn't put my finger on it. After a while, it struck me. He had written his seven differently, English style, no transverse bar.

"It was a small thing, but the best Pop could do with Monk and Gambrell leaning on him. He hoped I'd catch it, and finally I did."

Newman pushed his hat back

on his head, whistling softly. "I'll be damned. It sure would have escaped me."

"Plus there was one more jarring note Mandelbaum contrived. For twenty years he's been 'Pop' and I've been 'Terry' between us. So he signed the message 'Levi,' which he never would have done under ordinary circumstances. The two oddball facts together started me thinking. I went back, and the rest you know."

After that, there were handshakes and congratulations. At last, the room was empty save for O'Kane and Emily. He leaned back contentedly, fingers touching his wife's, mind wandering to the future, wondering what it held for both of them.

Maybe retirement wouldn't be so grim to contemplate, at that. No matter how many years he had left, he'd be able to get up each morning, look at himself in the mirror, one eye or no, and not shudder.

He might be coming to the end of the line as a cop.

But he would still be a man, and a good one.

Worth Waiting For:

IN THE SHADOWS—THE NEW MIKE SHAYNE NOVELET

By BRETT HALLIDAY

Next Month

AN UNUSUALLY CHILLING SUSPENSE THRILLER



THE TERRIBLE FOOTSTEPS

by THOMAS CALVERT McCLARY

The four slayings didn't seem the work of a fiend exactly . . . although they were as strange as the killer's choice of victims. And that posed a knotty problem for the police.



TWO HOURS AGO, window shopping on Second Avenue, Harriet Hyars could have triggered a nuclear explosion. In stretch tights and a roll top blouse, she was a Bohemian version of Virna Lisi. Her braided ponytail gave her a touch of Brigitte Bardot. She had everything.

Now, she had nothing, not even beauty.

She lay dead across her door-sill, her face bloated and awry and her body contorted, her braid still wrapped around her throat. Her keys still hung in the lock of her open door. Her purse had spilled

out through the hall in front of her, exposing two weeks' pay. Nothing had been touched except Harriet.

"If she'd been assaulted or robbed I could understand it," Lieutenant Becker complained. "But all he does is kill them, and that pulls the rug right out from under us."

Becker was Homicide East, and taking over, thank the Lord. It was bad enough to have four ponytail stranglings in my precinct without having to carry the investigation.

I could see Becker's point. No

motive for the murders had been unearthed. We didn't know what kind of kookie killer to look for. In no case had anything been stolen, not even a souvenir. There was no indication of sex or sadism. A jealous or rejected lover would almost certainly have slapped them around a little.

But these slayings had been incredibly bold, efficient, and brief. Because she had been coming in her hall door, we could check, almost to the minute, the time it had taken the killer to strangle his victim and disappear. Less than ten minutes had elapsed between the moment Harriet Hyars had come in the front door downstairs alone, and the time Mrs. Mischowsky had found her dead. Vic Dawydoff, the M.E., estimated that death had taken place within fifty seconds of the attack.

The jobs had been so smooth, so daring, that they were reminiscent of Murder Inc. But none of these girls had been involved in the underworld. Two of the four had not even verged upon beatnik, although all had lived in the low rent tenements of the Eastside's new Bohemia.

"The kook has got to have known them!" Becker rasped.

He was talking to himself. We had turned the lives of the victims inside out; there was no evidence of any link between them. They had no friends, hobbies, or interests in common. The only thing

they had in common was super sexiness and braided ponytails.

I thought, *Yeah, if she knew it.* But you can shadow a person as closely as his or her own shadow. Some muggers will shadow a cold sober and intelligent man for two blocks so close they could grab him at any time, and the victim will not be aware that anyone has been trailing him.

That gave me a thought, though. Some muggers are so small and slight of build that the victim does not catch sight of them if he glances across his shoulder. But a woman whose life is threatened is an eel. The picture we caught of this killer was that of a big man, violent and experienced. Also very strong.

We had reason to think that he knew judo, and simply used their ponytails for strangulation in preference to a surer, faster means of terminating their lives, because that was how he got his kick. After four murders, the only solid clues we had were the braid, the physical type of the victims, and the area the crimes had been committed in.

But no, there was one more item. Every attack had taken place fairly early in the evening when the streets were still crowded. In each case, the girls had just come home.

Becker shot me a nasty look. "Powell, what do you precinct boys do all day beside shake down

the bookies and hopheads?" he demanded.

That was my exit line. All Homicide wants of the precinct is whipping boys—and Homicide sure needed them in this case. The newspapers had not only the Police but the whole city administration on the spot.

I knocked out a cigarette and went downstairs. I'd already checked the tenement for suspects. There weren't any. Mrs. Mischowsky lived on the top floor. Nobody had been loitering in the hallways when she'd gone out for last-minute shopping. No other tenant had gone out or come in alone or been alone in an apartment for an hour before the crime except Mrs. Mischowsky. The alibies were pat.

There was still plenty of routine work to do in the block. Captain Doyer had arrived and was directing the uniformed boys in a check on cellars, roofs, firescapes, back yards. The entire precinct detective squad was questioning merchants, people who'd been on the street or lounging on the stoops. Doyer growled at me to check the neighborhood bars before Homicide ordered a three-hundred man saturation check that would shut

the neighborhood up like a clam.

I went through the routine, pretty sure it would turn up nothing but innocent bums and beatniks. I had the definite feeling that this was not a neighborhood job. I couldn't guess how or where the killer had gotten onto these chicks, but I felt damned sure he came from outside. He obviously knew the neighborhood, but that wasn't much of a help cluewise.

By two-thirty, there was nothing more to check until tomorrow. I needed a drink and a change of scenery from the immigrants with their vindictive suspicions, and the beatniks, with their cool, smart aleck humor. I had just finished screening the way-gone coffee pads on Sixth Street, and I hopped in the car and drove up to Lulu's at Thirteenth.

LULU'S IS A fight bar because Lulu Constantino won his last fifty-four fights. Fight bars are crazy places. All fighters think they should have been movie stars, MC's, gamblers or con men. The chances are good that there'll be a springling of such around, plus the experts and 'fighters' who never fought anything tougher than a monkey wrench.



The first one I spotted was Hermann, the plumber, on the end of a three-day drunk and telling Lulu how he had knocked Lulu Constantino flat in the fourth at Jersey Meadows.

Lulu poured him another drink and said, "I'm Lulu Constantino."

Hermann stood back from the bar and forced his eyes and brains into momentary focus. "Well, it was some other punk. But it was in the fourth," Hermann belched.

Lulu grinned and signalled me down to the reserved seats at the end of the bar. The place was hopping. Lulu had the radio, TV and jukebox all turned up to the top. Two longshoremen and three tugboat workers were outhollering the racket as they tried to bust up the shuffleboard. A pair of 'experts' at the bar were arguing the Dempsey-Firpo fight, which they weren't old enough to remember.

Queenie Delahanty, whom your grandpa might remember as the Girl of Seven Veils, took up the center of the bar, all of it, with her 360 pounds. For an old striptease babe, she was doing all right. She was singing the aria from *Lucia di Lammermoor* and telling a glazed sailor how she used to sing at the Metropolitan.

David, rotund and red-headed, was proclaiming his own greatness as mouthpiece for the fight, and other rackets for the benefit of a blonde sexpot wearing absolutely nothing, and not needing it, under

an original Dior. Tommy the Mountain, an ex-wrestler the size of a house, was demonstrating Ann Corio's strip act. Two beady-eyed gentry from Jersey, with shoes shined mirror bright and grey Borcellinos fresh out of the store, were taking in the scene without a glimmer of expression, except for chewing their cigars.

After the beatnik coffee pads with their gone-gone poetry and jazz and Sartre, Lulu's was a haven of relaxing normalcy.

Lulu scattered customers aside to make room for me in the reserved section. "Be my guest, Powell," he offered as he poured himself a dollar shot out of my sawbuck. He waved his shot glass at me. "Friend or enemy?" he asked.

"Friend," I said. "I'm just relaxing."

That kind of volunteered information is expected of you in the honest bars. If a detective is on a case he should have the courtesy to come right out and admit it.

I could see the faces of the crowd now, and felt a belt of surprise that I hadn't even noticed Luigi Antelli's back as I came down the bar. Luigi has been one of my problem children for twenty years, since he lived up in the elite Gramercy Park section, and was married to a beautiful piece of sadistic treachery named Sonya Chaloff.

Eventually, she smashed his self-confidence and ruined a really great pianist. He lived now, illegally, in one of the street floor stores on Twelfth Street, the only place he could afford that was big enough for his one remaining piece of property, his concert grand.

Luigi sat perched like a sparrow atop his stool, his little boy's body supporting his massive, sculptured head. He looked to be in one of his artistically haunted moods. His big, childlike eyes stared at his own reflection in the mirror, but every once in awhile he would cringe and tremble violently and look toward Lulu, who oddly enough was the high protector of artists in a section where anything but money or muscle was subject to the more predatory instincts of the neighborhood.

I made a gesture of a drink to Luigi, but failed to break his bad dream barrier. I said to Lulu, "What special kind of Martian nightmares has our great artist got tonight?"

"Footsteps," Lulu said. "He keeps hearing the footsteps of a killer."

"How does he know?"

"The footsteps tell him," Lulu said, grinning. Then he added, with a touch of Italian superstition, "Whatever he's hearing, I'd like to hit the horses that often. He's hit four out of six so far."

"Four out of six what?"

"Killings," Lulu said. "He's hit

these ponytail deals right on the head."

Something more than passing interest jolted me. My mind checked off reasons like an IBM. Suspicion? No. Maybe he knew the victims? No. Maybe he knew the killer? No, not if he was talking about it. Maybe the idea of destroying such beauty tore his sensitive feelings to pieces? Possible. But there was something more direct.

Then I caught it, the picture of Sonya, twenty years before, with her slim, feline body, and vicious, mocking laughter, and her soot-thick braided ponytail. She'd worn one long before they became popular.

"Just the ponytail murders? No others?" I grunted.

Lulu flipped his muscular fighter's hand. "How many murders can one guy commit? It's just this one killer he hears."

"Maybe he just *thinks* he's heard him—after he's listened to news of the murders on the radio," I said.

"No. Sometimes he's come in before it happened. Tonight he was in three or four times before, and scared to go home, too. He's like a kid that's scared of a dark room."

Lulu looked up at Luigi with odd sympathy for a fighter. "Guess it goes with the music. You feel one thing, you feel another. That right, Powell?"

"Well—maybe," I said carefully.

Lulu went up bar to arbitrate the Dempsey-Firpo argument which the boys were about to reenact in person. I watched Luigi Antelli. He was mumbling to himself. Big tears crawled out of his eyes one by one and zigzagged down his face. Once I saw his lips form the distinct words, *No! Don't! Don't do it!*

After the drink, I moved up bar to wedge in beside him. But for a few minutes, he didn't notice me, although he could see me clearly in the mirror. He just kept mumbling, his fine, strong, pianist hands clasped around his glass as if it were a holy relic. He kept mumbling, not clearly enough to enable me to catch his actual words, but with the tone and intensity of a man arguing with another man.

I broke suddenly, but softly, into his stream of thoughts, "Do you know him, Luigi?" I asked, trying to sound casual.

He turned and stared at me, a look of relief coming into his eyes. His body didn't move, but I had the odd feeling that he'd hugged me desperately, like the kid Lulu had mentioned—a kid who is scared of the dark and suddenly finds his father bent over him.

"Thank God—Powell!" he said, and it was almost a sob. "I should have thought of you. Now, it's too late."

"What gives?" I asked. "You know who this duck is?"

"Yes, I know him. How I know him! But not like you mean. I've never seen him."

Lulu was busy doing a double shuffle at the moment, so I signalled refills from his bartender.

"How can you know a man you've never seen?" I asked Luigi.

He looked incensed. "Why do you have to see a man to know him? Can't you know his voice or cough or footsteps just as easily?"

All sound symbols, I thought. Naturally. He's a pianist. His ears are his eyes. He thinks in sound.

"He comes by often," he said hoarsely. "I know his steps. You're familiar with my place. It has a glass front. I can hear every sound from in front, but I can't see out because the glass is painted. But he comes by when he is angered, tortured beyond endurance, trying to walk it off. I know what he is going through because it is just like it used to be with me."

"When you were married to Sonya?"

"Yes! You must recall how it was. The neighbors complained a half dozen times and you came over to quiet things."

I REMEMBERED clearly. I remembered the first time particularly. I was young then, and I was so mad that night that I could have beaten her to a pulp myself. I won't say that I wanted to kill

her, quite. But I easily might have, if things had started.

We had a complaint at Twentieth Street. I was a third grade then and sent over to quiet the riot because uniformed cops would have embarrassed the class of people living in Gramercy Park. There was little integration in those days, not even among white people, and Gramercy Park was strictly class.

It sounded like a TV horror movie going on inside. There'd be surges of crashing furniture and bricabrac, accompanied by high pitched, half-choked squeals of anger such as an elephant makes. Then there'd be the gales of Sonya's laughter—wicked, sexy, and contemptuous. And then more squeals and crashes.

I rang, but nobody heard, or answered. I tried the door and found it open. I walked in, but nobody saw me and I stood there, watching Luigi. He was like a tormented little boy, crashing whatever he could grab into the big marble fireplace.

Sonya was stretched out like a cat atop the grand pinao, slopping champagne into a crystal glass, and watching him with the bright, excited eyes of a well-fed cat playing with a helpless and tormented mouse.

"Go ahead, break up the whole house!" she was taunting him. "It can't sound any worse than you played tonight!"



Little Luigi, white as a ghost, screamed again and grabbed a small marble statue of himself off the mantle.

"Now break up yourself," Sonya purred with mockery. "The bust of you by Frisch, that's so much greater than you'll ever be! Smash that too. Go ahead—there's nothing else left."

Luigi smashed it. If I'd been him, I would have smashed it on her head. And then he stood dead quiet, looking, dissolving into the broken pieces of the terrible thing

he'd done. An irreplaceable piece of art, and the sculptor dead. It utterly shattered him. That was when her laughter became totally victorious. That was what she'd wanted to make him do.

"Yes, I remember," I said. "But how does this affect the man you hear? The killer?"

"Detective Powell, he is being driven crazy by the same thing! I could not be wrong. I can feel it—just as if he came and told me. He has a woman who drives him so mad he must kill her. It is a compulsion."

"You didn't kill Sonya," I pointed out.

He looked down at his glass, torn up with shame. "I should have. If I'd had the nerve, the courage, I would have done it. I am not very brave, but this man is braver, and when she drives him too far he cannot contain himself. To escape from his torment he must kill her, even if he pays for it with his life."

His explanation did not fit the case, of course. But I did not want to interrupt the trend of his thoughts by saying so. I said instead, "And each time you've heard him you've known there was a dangerous violence in him?"

"And many times more," Luigi breathed hard. "But usually, he walks his temper off. Yet sometimes he can't, his anger and hurt are too great. He walks past my door two, three, four times and

each time his fury keeps mounting. I can feel it, as if I myself were in torment and I want to rush out and stop him. I want to let him know that there is somebody who understands. But I am afraid, Detective Powell. My courage fails me, and I always wait, silently listening, until his footsteps continue on down the street."

He paused and looked at me doubtfully. "You do not believe all this? You don't think a blind man could tell by sound alone—"

I said carefully, "Luigi, a man who lacks the gift of sight may have sensitivities the rest of us don't have."

"Come," he said. "I am going to prove to you that what I have been saying is the truth."

We went over to his place, a block away. It was a glass-front barn dedicated to his concert grand piano. Outside of that, he possessed a two burner electric plate, a rumpled cot, and stacks of dust-covered music. Except for his battered piano stool, there was no chair.

I sat on the bed and he sat down and began to play. What he played, I have no idea. Perhaps he was improvising. It was beautiful music, and it made me think of a girl I once hoped to marry. But subtly it began to change, and suddenly my whole body went taut. I was breathing hard, and I caught myself looking into shadows for a nameless, indefinable

menace that was not there, of course.

Antelli broke off suddenly and spun around on his stool. "I've succeeded in making you aware of what sound can do to you?" he demanded.

"Well, thunder, a backfire can be nerve shattering, too," I said, trying to be realistic. "But unnerving me by your playing isn't quite the same thing as reading another person's mind."

"There is no real difference," Luigi said. "The difference is only that you are used to seeing with your eyes. To a blind man, or even a dog, the tone of your voice, your walk, the sound of your movements—may be things we cannot identify *within* the sounds—are as revealing as a man's face can be if you watch him closely as he talks."

Well, it could be. I granted him that much. There are times when you can smell the murder impulse in a man. There are times when you sense that he is going to strike, or run, even though he is outwardly calm and seems not in the least agitated.

Although Luigi's hands had not faltered in the slightest on the keys, he now had difficulty lighting a cigarette. He went behind a partition that housed a tub and sink, brought out a bottle of very fine cognac and poured a drink in what I was sure was his only glass.

"Tonight," he said, "this tortured man went by four times.

Each time, the fury in him was raging. I could feel it, so sharply it was like a pain in the region of my heart. Tonight she had driven him beyond endurance, and I wanted desperately to stop him from what I was sure would happen. But, as usual, I was afraid."

As he drank from the bottle his face looked tragically stricken. "Maybe Sonya was right," he muttered. "Maybe I am less than a man. Just nothing. But tonight the impulse to go out and stop him was so strong I finally found the courage."

I leaned forward. "You saw him then?"

"No," Luigi shook his head. "I had to force myself to open the door. He had vanished. But I could hear the footsteps still, and I followed the sound down Second Avenue. Sometimes I lost it, but soon I picked it up again, for he was not moving in a straight line. He weaved back and forth as if looking for someone, like a bird dog in the field."

"How far did you follow?" I said.

"To the end. I am sure it was the end. I followed into the block between Avenue A and First Avenue on Sixth Street. And then I lost the sound entirely. But then, after a time, I must have heard something vague, indefinable that chilled me to the core of my being. It has vanished from my memory, but there had to be something, be-

cause I knew he had killed her. That frightened me horribly."

"You didn't wait to see what he looked like?"

"No, I was too frightened, Detective Powell. I ran back to Lulu's."

Well, I had seen much tougher specimens than Luigi shocked and frightened out of their wits by murder. I was still thinking over what he had said when I realized how completely I had absorbed the mood and fancy of his story. For, of course, there was the basic discrepancy.

"Luigi," I said, "A man cannot commit the same murder four times."

He looked bewildered. "But I could not be wrong!" he said excitedly. "And it is only that one woman he wants to kill. I could swear to that!"

He shook his head disbelievingly. "It is true that he killed four times. But I did not think of that at the time. It does not make me less certain there is only one woman he wants to murder. And don't forget—they all wore braided ponytails!"

I could see that my remark had profoundly disturbed him, despite his genuine attempt to rationalize it away.

I noticed he had a phone and scribbled a number on a piece of paper. "I'll tell you what, Luigi," I said. "If you hear those footsteps again, phone this number. Just

give your name, and say you want to see me right away."

I WENT BACK to the car and sat there in the darkness, watching the now deserted streets, trying to catch the angle on this. I was too old a hand to discount ESP or thought transference or clairvoyance altogether. In some odd way, Luigi Antelli appeared to be tuned in on this murder trick. But just how much of it was filled in by news reports *after* the crime, and how much was supplied by his own experiences, years back, with Sonya, made considerable difference in his reliability.

I did not doubt at all that he thought he'd heard the killer. Or that he felt the same harrowing anguish that Sonya had put him through before she had ruined and divorced him and thought the man with the footsteps was suffering the same treatment from his woman.

As far as that went, I did not altogether disbelieve that he might actually have heard the man talking to the woman he had slain and he had certainly either followed or bungled by chance into the right block tonight.

I simply disbelieved his 'psychic' explanation.

I had no intention of turning in a report on this. Homicide East would sweat the poor little guy to death. For Luigi, it would be a worse ordeal than any he'd gone

through with Sonya. I did not believe that anybody or any tests could get more out of him than he'd told me. As far as suspicion of Luigi went, Luigi was just not the murder type, and I'd seen him under conditions which would have made most normal men succumb to violence.

So I wasn't turning him over to Lieutenant Becker's not-so-gentle interrogation. But that didn't mean I wasn't bugged by the story, and the coincidence that all of these victims had been the same general type, physically, as Sonya, and that her trademark, the braided ponytail, was the significant feature of the murders.

The next evening, I went over to Billy's on Tenth Avenue for dinner just to get away from the Eastside atmosphere for a time. It was a wholesale and warehouse neighborhood, and Billy's had seen very little change in its decor in a hundred odd years. Butchers, longshoremen and truckers still came in for a drink in shirt sleeves. But the dinner trade was chiefly uptown gourmets, and I was not too surprised to see the three top psychiatrists from Neurologic Hospital.

Sam Stevens, the senior, waved me over. Psychiatrists are suckers for any sensational murder case. This time, I decided to let them buy dinner. I had Luigi Antelli's story to tell, which should really give them a double take.

To my surprise, Stevens did not seem to think the story at all unusual. "Complete empathy, based on his own experience," he said, frowning thoughtfully.

"Meaning?" I grunted.

Stevens chuckled. "It probably occurs more often in women than in men. A sister or close friend grows so concerned with another woman's childbirth that, to greater or lesser extent, she goes through the entire experience of gestation and birth herself, experiencing labor pains that are often agonizing."

"What you gentlemen are talking about," I protested, "would, I should imagine, apply only to people who know each other, and are very close in their emotions."

"No, there have been cases of thought, or emotional, transmission, some at very considerable distances," Stevens said. "In fact, that kind of emotional transmission is well-established. You've felt it yourself at times, when somebody wanted to hurt or kill you."

"But that was defense instinct," I said.

"Stretch it a point," Stevens said. "Suppose you wanted to know *why* a man wanted to kill you. Ordinarily, you'd have only the most superficial guess or reasoning to go on. But suppose, at some point of your past, you experienced a killing rage directed toward another man under pre-

cisely the same conditions. The memory would be very likely to recur to you, and as a result you'd understand his homicidal hatred almost as if you were in his shoes."

"And then we stretch the point again?"

"Exactly, if you're sensitive enough to this other man's—well, suppose we call them electropsychic vibrations. For the moment, you, or one part of you, becomes a facsimile of him. You feel, think, and are disturbed in precisely the same way."

"But Luigi Antelli never lifted his hand against his wife, and believe me, he had provocation. The phantom strangler murdered four girls, and it is my bet that he could not have known them all intimately—if he knew them at all. By that, I mean, he could not possibly have had the same motive as Luigi would have had for killing his wife."

"Ah," Stevens chided. "You literal minded policemen. Say, for the sake of argument, that he did not know any of them at all, but simply goes for women of that type. So—he made some overture, and was spurned, or told off with contempt. To certain personalities that could be just as ignominious and enraging as all the mockery that Luigi's wife heaped upon him."

"I suggest a second possibility," younger Dr. Hoch said. "The old Oedipus complex, or reason-

able substitute. These victims have all been of a similar type. It would not surprise me if they bore striking resemblance to a mother he loved and lost, or perhaps hated."

"It would have to be a mother?" I grunted.

Stevens laughed outright. "You don't like Freud, Detective Powell? Call it the mother-image then. All women men love or hate violently bear the mother image in some manner."

"Then it could be a woman who is still alive, but whom he is scared to hurt. And that forces him to pick a substitute?"

The three doctors glanced at each other and thought that over. "A substitute, yes," Stevens conceded at length. "That could be the case."

I got so wrapped up with that idea that I didn't remember eating my six-buck steak. But it still came out nowhere, except for the possibility that Luigi might honestly be tuned in on the killer's emotional torture at times when he heard his angry footsteps.

I did not by any means forget the case, but it was slipping beneath the daily pileup of other assorted crimes as five weeks passed with no further sign nor clue of the ponytail strangler. Luigi seemed to have forgotten it as you forget the sharp details of a bad dream. His memory now was vague and fuzzy. He remembered the terrible footsteps, and that he'd been

greatly frightened and upset. Beyond that, he simply felt a vast but formless sympathy and sadness for the killer.

It was a surprise, then, to get an urgent message from him relayed at nine thirty-two one evening, when I was staked out on a loft job. I debated on the urgency, cursed, and finally left my partner, Skitch Tempest, on the loft job and drove over to Luigi's.

It took him a long time to answer the door. I suspected that he'd pulled himself out of hiding from under all the blankets in his place. He was sober, but his face looked like smeared paste. Hallucination or real, he was scared stiff.

The man, he said—he refused to call him a killer—had gone by twice, the second time almost at a dogtrot, symbolic of his mounting fury.

"It's a terrible sound, the sound of murder," Luigi whispered hoarsely. "It's like a screech, reaching higher and higher until something's got to break."

The man had headed East on Twelfth, he said, and had passed the second time only minutes ago. I jumped in the car, but slowed at the corner. I could see down First Avenue several blocks, but there was no sign of anyone hurrying, except some running kids.

I drove to the extreme end of the street and circled back on Thirteenth. Near Second Avenue,



frankly to my surprise, I got a break. Oddly, I nearly passed the man thinking it was Luigi. Same little boy body, same statuesque head from the back, but with an aggressive vitality Luigi did not possess, I realized as I slowed. In the next block, the man slowed from a fast walk, and turning north on Third Avenue, continued to slow down all the way to Nick's Tavern, where he turned in.

In the intervening time, he had passed a few girls and women wearing ponytails or single braids and had looked at none, if they even registered. There was a girl with braids inside at the bar giving him a hopeful eye, but he had gone to the far end of the bar alone, and paid no attention to her. He had two cognacs and left, lighting a cigarette as he came out, looking like a man thoroughly irritated, but far from homicidal.

He zigzagged home at a leisurely pace, crossing the south of

Gramercy Park to one of the expensive modernized buildings on the west side and letting himself in the downstairs door. A few seconds later, I saw living room lights brighten the top floor. A woman squealed rebelliously through the open windows, and then shut off in midnote as a man's voice rose in anger. Perhaps he'd tapped her too, I thought, and a coldness inched up my spine.

I got out of the car and looked at the doorbell and wondered if I were in Disneyland for a moment. There were two names on the bell—Amos Sampson, and Sonya Chaloff.

Sampson's name I knew. He was one of the rocketing off-Broadway producers of musicals. Then I recalled that he had married Sonya a couple of years after she had divorced Luigi Antelli. Same type of man, same neighborhood, and, at least, both men were connected with music in one way or another.

There was nothing so strange in those facts. But it was damned strange that Amos should be the man with the terrible footsteps.

I WENT BACK to Nick's and cornered the bartender. "Oh, yes," the barkeep said, "Amos Sampson is a regular customer, a little moody sometimes, but that wife of his is enough to drive any man nuts. If she pulls the scenes at home she's pulled here, I'd slug

her with a hammer if she were my wife."

"What's he do about it?"

"Well, maybe he taps her quiet once in awhile. I've seen her with a black eye. But mostly, I guess he just walks off his steam. He'll come in here all charged up, ugly silent, not even grunting his drink. He'll toss it off fast, go out and walk awhile, then stop back on his way home, pretty well simmered down."

I asked a few leading questions. Being who he was, the women threw themselves at Sampson, but the barkeep had never seen him show interest in any other woman. Sometimes, if they forced him to be polite, he bought them a drink without joining them and took off.

"Go for ponytails or braids at all?" I asked.

"God, he hates them!" The barkeep laughed. "Reminds him too much of that wildcat of his, I guess." He looked speculative. "Still, she's a handsome piece when she isn't browbeating. You'd guess her fifteen years younger if you didn't know."

That would bring her looks down to the twenty-five age bracket. Same as the girls who'd been murdered, I thought.

But—he had not killed anyone tonight, unless it was Sonya, and there was nothing to do about him except keep on the alert for him down below in the new Bohemia.

I drove over to the Twentieth

Street precinct to check with the boys there. Oh, they knew the Sampsons, all right, detective Keane grinned. Regular atomic project over there. Some of the rows after dress rehearsals were real kilotrons. Apparently, Sonya made a specialty of bugging him just when a new show was starting.

"Same as she used to do with Luigi after a concert," I said.

"But he's not the same, you can bet on that," Keane said. "There's not much of him; you could step over him without notice, but he doesn't take any crap off that broad. When she goes just so far, he puts her in place fast."

"Like what place?"

"Well, last time we walked in, she was out cold and lying on a bearskin rug in the living room. For a little guy, he must hit like a mule kick."

So, Amos was not above smacking his little wife, and evidenced a good deal more violence and toughness than Luigi had ever possessed.

"You'd think sometime he might get mad enough to bump her," I suggested.

"I guess he would if he didn't walk it off," Keane chuckled. "But she's a lot of woman when she isn't jawbreaking. When you've got a piece of property like that, I don't suppose you want to bury it."

But you might take it out on substitutes, I thought. It was sim-

ply a thought. Little more. Except that a wife with braided hair and ponytails drove him nuts with anger occasionally, and that he took long walks to steam off his fury, there was absolutely nothing against Amos Sampson other than Luigi's interpretation of his footsteps.

I popped out a cigarette and thought about that angle. Was it possible that Luigi actually knew whose footsteps he'd set me on to, and was doing it from jealousy and malice, to embarrass the man who had replaced him with Sonya? I decided Luigi was clean in that respect. Even if he had a dirty streak of that sort in his nature, which I didn't think he had, there was the matter of his utter, stark terror the nights he heard the footsteps. No actor could have faked that terror.

In any case there had been no strangling tonight.

IN THE FOLLOWING month, I could find nothing incriminating against Amos' character. He was an occasional angel at the beatnik joints, but for a theatrical man, there was nothing unusual in that. However, it did mean that he was familiar with the lower East Side area called Village East, where all of the stranglings had taken place.

I followed him around a couple of evenings; was almost right next to him in one of the village bars he stopped for a drink. He was watching, rather intently, a pretty girl

who was looking directly at him as she sang. But she wasn't a braided ponytail, and since he was an off-Broadway producer she may have recognized him. After one more drink Amos left. And I never bothered to tail him again.

Then came another call from Luigi, frantic this time. He was breathing so hard and fast that he could scarcely make his words come out. Tonight, he said, there was something very special to the footsteps. The killer was already out of his head. Nothing was going to stop him. "Hurry," Luigi sobbed "Or you'll be too late."

It was early for murder—8:54. That seemed particularly early for Mr. Sampson, so I took time to phone the bartender at Nick's.

"Yes, Sampson was here. Worse storm than usual," the bartender said.

I phoned a theatrical columnist. Sampson had engaged in a high tempered row with a playwright in a cocktail bar that day and had threatened to close a show unless certain changes were made. Sonya had joined with the author's opinion. It had looked like a Donnybrook until Sampson stalked out, his wife following ten minutes later.

I checked through Twentieth Street and waited for a return call from the patrolman on Gramercy Park duty. It was Stacey, who said the Sampsons had made a good start on a riot when they both got

home, but Amos had left the house, purple with rage, and was still out.

I ran down to the car and hit the siren to break a traffic light and gunned the car to Luigi's block. There was no sign of Amos now, of course. I went on through on a wild chance, racing down to Avenue C and then back on 13th, where I'd picked him up before. No sign of him, or of anyone who even looked angry.

I drove back to Luigi's. Lights showed around his doorway. I hammered, yelled through, but raised no answer. After a full minute, one of the kids said he'd gone out in a hurry and headed south on First.

"God bless his timid little soul!" I thought. "He made himself follow when he figured things were going to bust."

I touched the siren oftener than in a whole year before. I made like a nut sweeping back and forth on one-way streets looking for Luigi—St. Marks Place, Seventh, Sixth, Fifth and Fourth. Up and down Avenues A, B, C, 1st, 2nd, and 3rd. I was doubling through a second time when I saw a small figure just for an instant, rounding the corner of St. Marks, heading south on Avenue A.

At that point, Avenue A borders Tompkins Square. Anywhere from two to five thousand people take the air of a pleasant night, meeting friends or doing last min-

ute snack shopping along the way. At that hour of the night, the avenue was packed as if it were a holiday, Ukrainians, Poles, Italians, Jews, and Russians, forming a river that moved and backed in all directions.

Here and there I distinguished the beatniks, the avant garde, and a few legitimate artists. Just flashes of them, like jumping fish, trying to make haste against the jostling, unhurried older residents, who'd done their day's work and saw no reason to hurry. And in one of the knots of people midblock, I saw Amos dart through.

It couldn't be Luigi Antellio. Never would Luigi have the aggressiveness to shoulder through like that. So it must be Sampson, and travelling fast—fast enough to suggest a killer who was closing on his victim.

At the corner ahead, there was a traffic pileup. I felt grim and cold at the nape of the neck as I parked double and hit the street afoot. At Sixth Street, I'd lost him. He might have turned east or west or gone straight ahead. I had to take time to lift myself up on a lamppost to reconnoiter. There was a girl with a ponytail moving west on this street, and I had almost decided to follow her, when I saw Amos cutting obliquely across the avenue toward the other corner of Fifth Street.

And then I saw, ahead of him, a girl with a long braid down her

back, moving straight across Fifth, fishing keys out of a small purse as she crossed.

Amos was closing on her rapidly from about forty feet behind. It was incredible how his small body sank into the scene with a minimum of attention. Everybody stared at my hurried pace, but nobody seemed to even notice him.

The girl turned at right angle into a tenement, darting up the three steps of the stoop with that high knee thrust that young women use on steps. Amos swung in behind her. I crossed the street to follow close.

The girl had started up the inner stairs. I expected to see Amos loping to close behind her, but as he turned into the stairwell, he was moving much slower than on the street. His head was cocked to the side as if listening intently to the sound of her movements from above. I followed, not nearly so concerned that he'd hear me as that he'd see me as he crossed a landing to the next flight, but he was absorbed.

Three flights up, the girl's footsteps moved clearly toward the rear. Her key didn't work the first time, and she gave an exclamation of irritation. Amos stopped dead midway of the stairs, listening, and looking up. He did not move until the bang of a door and the sharp snip of a lock carried through the hallways. Then he took the stairs upward two at a

time, racing now, heading toward the roof.

It was a break for me. I took the whole flight of stairs in a rush, whipped down her hallway, and rapped the right hand rear door with finger tips. That rap sounded inside clearly, but gave the least possible echo in the hall.

"Who is it?" she called, her voice puzzled.

I put my mouth to the crack. "Police. Open up and quick," I said.

"But—"

"Open up, lady, or I'll blow your damned lock off!" I said grimly.

The door opened a crack. She had her foot braced against the bottom. I flashed my badge, but I was already heaving the door open with my shoulder, quite illegally. She looked at me wide-eyed, not scared so much as ready to give argument.

"Shut up," I snapped before she could start. "There's no time to explain this. Go back inside, take off your coat, act just as you would when getting home. Don't look my way, don't speak, and don't be scared. Hurry."

She was a bright young lady. She caught fast. She nodded, moved back to her kitchen, which was the first room, and took off her jacket, while humming a tune. She primped her hair, washed her hands, put on water for coffee, and vanished into the toilet. That required putting on the toilet light.

The glow of that window would show to anyone on the fire escape.

In another room, there was a slight grate, such as the careful lifting of a window might make. A sudden draft drifted across my face as I stood flat against the hallway wall.

The girl came out of the toilet. With admirable self control, she kept from peering in my direction. She moved out of sight and her icebox banged. Then she came back into vision, carrying a cup to the stove and standing there, hip-shot, waiting for the kettle to whistle.

A hand and arm came from the dark room doorway as if disembodied and moving of itself. The hand was strong. Veins and muscles stood out under tension. Murder shaped it into something grim as a vulture's claw.

There was no hesitation in the movement of the arm. It came straight behind her. The hand clapped over her mouth and jerked her backward as the small boy's body exploded out of darkness. In the same movement, his other hand whipped her braid around her throat. He loosed her mouth and jerked the braid tight before she could utter a clear scream.

She fought, her movements automatic now as terror gripped her. She clawed at the coil around her throat. Probably, if she thought at all, she thought her assailant was me.

I couldn't move in on a scene like that in a bull's rush. If I scared him, he might give her braid such a violent snap that it would crack her larynx. He had to move clear of the doorway himself. That put his back to me.

He jerked her another step backward to clear her from the stove. She was already strangling. It was then that I stepped out silently and slapped my blackjack behind his ear.

He sank behind her, spilling her with him. I knelt to loosen the lethal coil.

"It's all right now," I told her. "You hurt?"

She sat up gingerly feeling her throat and coughed. She gave a jerky laugh. "I guess not, but I sure won't sing tonight," she wheezed.

I turned to throw handcuffs on the strangler. The muscle in those hands and wrists, I thought. How in hell did these little guys get it? Then I saw his face.

"Good God!" I muttered. It was Luigi Antelli.

The girl looked at me. "You sound like he's your brother."

I said hoarsely, "Worse. He might be my feeble-minded kid."

I went into the other room and called Nick's. The barkeep said Amos had just come in, stormier than usual, sweat soaked from a walk.

I clicked off and called the precinct for patrolmen. This was one

case we'd hand Homicide East on a platter.

I went back to the kitchen. The girl was sponging Luigi's neck with a wet cloth and frowning.

"Doesn't he play the organ at church sometimes?" she said, puzzled.

I nodded. "One of the greatest in his day."

"But I never met him. Why



would he want to hurt me?" she asked.

I said, "It is like this. He thinks he's somebody else. No, that's not it, either. For a few minutes, he was somebody else—"

She shot me a strange look. I spread my hands.

I said, "He was doing this out of sympathy. He couldn't stand the way another man was being hurt."

My voice was raw. I was angry at being so stupid all along, even though I still didn't understand. Those pianist hands and forearms of Luigi's were powerful as an

ape's. I should have suspected it.

Luigi began to regain consciousness. He recognized me before his senses were quite clear. "Thank God you got here, Detective Powell! Did you get here in time? Did you catch him?"

"Where were you?" His answer was going to be his one damned chance in court.

"I was following. I never saw him, but I was following the footsteps. They were terrible to hear, Powell. Terrible!" he sobbed.

I gave him a friendly shake and unlocked the handcuffs. "He'll never do harm again, Luigi," I said.

He sat up, but rocked against the stove for support. "It was Sonya, wasn't it?" he asked.

"Me?" the girl pantomined over his head and made a negative gesture.

"I guess Sonya was the reason, but he didn't get her," I said.

Luigi uttered a long sobbing sigh. "She deserved it, but I guess I'm glad. She was vicious, but she's too beautiful to die."

I stood up and lighted a cigarette with a snap. I felt raw and

ugly. I'm no bleeding heart, but what did you do to judge a case like this?

If there was a God in Heaven, he'd know Luigi Antelli had not committed these murders. The murders had been committed by the angry thoughts of Amos Sampson transposed to poor Luigi's ultra sensitivity.

"I don't quite understand," the girl was saying.

"I don't myself," I said.

I went back to her phone and dialed Dr. Stevens, the head shrinker. I said, "Doc, maybe you can keep Luigi Antelli from the torture chamber. He's been the phantom pulling the ponytails."

"Ah—I should have suspected that," he said. "I'll pick up my lawyer and be right down."

"Make it fast," I suggested. "It's going to be rough on him when they try to sweat a confession. He doesn't know he's the one."

I stood staring out the window without any satisfaction in breaking the case, except that the epidemic of stranglings was ended. Sometimes a cop wonders if witchcraft is really dead.

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HANGOVER

The killer's victim had mastered the art of keeping silent . . . even though hanging evidence had been poured into his ears.

by **EDWARD WELLEN**

A FORCE OF screaming furies tormentors straight out of a TV commercial, hammer-and-

tongued in Bill Dunn's head. At the peak of the ill-tempered black-smithing a chilling realization plunged him into wakefulness. He had spent the night before bending his elbow—and someone's ear.

For nearly three years he hadn't touched a drop, knowing his tongue would loosen—and his neck tighten. Now, after holding out against temptation in that des-

ert of a thousand days, he had succumbed to the devils of memory and thirst.

And what he had feared would happen had happened. He had spilled his guts to some sympathetic listener—he didn't know who—in some sleazy bar—he didn't know where.

Foggily, he could see himself and a stranger sitting in a booth guzzling and talking. He was doing most of the talking. The other limited himself to encouraging nods and grunts. A man's face began to take shape in his mind. Spongy features arranged themselves into a cunning, fawning expression. The eyes had a drinking-in-every-word look, as Dunn sober visualized them watching Dunn drunk.

Why wouldn't they have that look? It wasn't every evening a solid citizen confided that his wife's death wasn't the accident it seemed. How the sympathetic listener's ears must have flapped, fanning in the details!

The little furies brought the anvil chorus to a crescendo. His eyes watered. He had managed to weep at his wife's funeral. But the moisture now was caused by mental anguish and acute physical pain.

Just possibly, however, things weren't as bad as they seemed. The man might have been too drunk himself to realize what he had. Or he might have put it all down to the solid citizen's liquid

expression of maudlin feelings of guilt, not something to take very seriously. Dunn winced. Things were probably worse than they seemed.

He hoped he hadn't told the man his name, where he lived, where he worked. He thought he had come home by himself. He prayed that the man hadn't tailed him. He had to find the man before the man found him. Otherwise, he was in for blackmail or a murder charge.

Dunn had always been one for slow thinking out and great patience in working out the details of a problem. But this called for quick thought, and fast action. He pulled the clock on the dresser into focus, and straightened with a suddenness that brought a cringing recoil. He reached for the phone with care. He dialed his office, gritting his teeth at the horrendous ratcheting each time the dial spun back.

Though he felt sure his secretary's solicitude was not phoney, her alarm at Mr. Dunn's calling in sick tried his nerves.

He said through his teeth, "Thank you, Miss Stizza. I know I'll be fine tomorrow." He hesitated. "By the way—"

He closed his eyes at her eager, "Yes?"

"If anyone should make inquiries of a personal nature about me, you won't—"

"Of course not, Mr. Dunn."

He hung up gently on a hurt and puzzled and loyal Miss Stizza. He made his way to the bathroom. A cold towel lessened the throbbing. Wearing a damp turban, he downed aspirins and black coffee, and gathered himself for the hunt. He half-expected the phone to ring before he set out. But it didn't.

IT WASN'T EASY to track down a foggy image of a man.

It had been the foggy image of a woman that jounced him off the wagon to begin this mess. Michaela. He had killed his wife to be free to marry Michaela, only to have Michaela throw him over for a richer man. And the woman he had seen yesterday afternoon, making memory and thirst too strong to resist, hadn't even been Michaela—merely someone who looked somewhat like her. But that was beside the point.

The point was to find the man. That difficulty troubled Dunn more than what would probably happen when he found the man. It seemed to him that his drinking companion of the night before had been slight of build. This meant Dunn could deal with him in the same way he had dealt with his wife. His murder could be made to look like an accident.

It was evening now, and in this part of town the street lights were dim. But bars were frequent, spilling *pousse-cafes* of neon on the asphalt. Dunn had been at it since

the neons began flickering on. He had thought it useless to start earlier—he would have missed the night bartenders, and one of them might remember seeing Dunn and his friend and might be able to tell Dunn the name of the friend.

He soon found it was the bartenders he would have to look to. In the first bar the steady customers were already working at getting unsteady. To pass the time, they punched the windbag about tonight's heavyweight title bout.

Dunn ordered a beer and sat waiting for an opportunity to edge into their talk. But they ignored him. Maybe it was because he was a stranger. Maybe it was because they thought him a suffering mortal whose right to be alone to commune with his soul they respected. The furies in his skull were not yet still and, as he could tell from the bar mirror, the hangover still showed.

So it was to the bartender he spoke.

That became the routine. Dunn stopped in at a bar, failed to spot his friend, ordered a beer, tried the place on for a feeling of familiarity while taking token sips and fighting down his greed for a real pick-up, and looked for recognition in the eyes of the bartender.

When he found none he inquired anyway if the bartender had seen a slight, spongy-faced man of about fifty at any time during the past ten hours, saw the eyes

widen or narrow and the head shake *no*, and shoved off from his full glass of beer, to stop in at the next bar with the same lineup of questions waiting to be asked.

He came almost to believe that there was no trace to find of a listening stranger with spongy features that arranged themselves into a cunning, fawning expression, and that he had been talking to a grotesque distortion of himself in some mirroring surface.

Then he found the place. It looked like all the others, had the same beery, smoky atmosphere, the customary clientele. But when he passed through the swinging doors and crossed to the bar he knew he had been here the night before. He failed to spot his friend, and found the varnish of the woodwork of the booths too grimy to give back any likeness of himself. He ordered a beer.

The bartender's nod held recognition.

Here too the talk was of tonight's heavyweight title bout. The bartender drew Dunn's beer while watching a fat man flatten the air to show how the champ should do it. The bartender cut the foam, set the glass before Dunn. His eyes met Dunn's and he jerked his head the expert's way and smiled.

Dunn smiled back. He put down a five-dollar bill as though he meant to take out the change in drinks. He tried to sound off-handed as he asked if a slight, spongy-

faced man of about fifty had been around.

The bartender looked hard at Dunn and thought a while before he answered with a touch of suspicion.

"Yeah, I know who you mean. You and him was cozy last night over in the corner booth. What you want with him?"

"I borrowed something from him and forgot to give it back. I was pretty drunk."

"Yeah? What?"

After only the merest pause, Dunn reached into his pocket and brought out his silver lighter. He kept his fingers over his brazed-on monogram. He made it flare and go out.

"This."

"Where'd Pete ever get a nice lighter like that? Let's have a look at it."

Dunn pretended he hadn't heard the last part, pocketed the lighter.

"He said he found it."

Dunn hoped he hadn't stirred resentment in the bartender. But the bartender suddenly smiled at something. For an instant, Dunn thought the man he wanted might be standing right behind him, having heard words that would have made Dunn out a liar. But the bartender was smiling at something he saw in his own mind.

"Yeah, like I said, you and Pete Otis was sitting together over there. I sure had to laugh at the



way Pete kept nodding his head and tossing them down."

Dunn stood up abruptly, frowned at his watch. "It's later than I thought. Got to go. Where does Pete live?"

The bartender shrugged. "Rooming house somewheres on Eighth, I think. Too bad you can't stay. Pete's pretty near a regular. He'll probably show up here around ten. If you want to, you can leave the lighter with me, and I'll give it to him. He probably didn't even miss it."

Dunn pretended he hadn't heard, nodded a preoccupied farewell, scooped up his change, and left.

Once outside, he took out his pen knife and pried his monogram off the lighter. He hesitated, then

pocketed the fancy silver cutout with the rest.

His head felt suddenly clear, his brain sharp.

WILLIAM DUNN'S watch read nine-twenty when, standing in a dark doorway near the corner, he saw Pete Otis coming. That made this the perfect time and place for the job.

He let the man move unseeingly past him, scrutinizing him from head to foot. This was the man, all right. Dunn stepped out after him, and touched him lightly on the shoulder. The man turned with a start, and almost instantly his face broke out in a smile.

"Ah, it's you," he said loudly.

Dunn read a lot into that smile—it looked both guilty and gloating, he thought—and the aggressive tone of the man's voice.

He handed Otis the lighter. Otis took it in wonder and turned it over. He looked up to Dunn for explanation. But by then Dunn had glanced both ways to make sure that no one was coming, and was slicing down with the edge of his hand on the back of Otis' neck.

The instant his victim sagged and went limp he caught him by the shoulders and lowered him to the sidewalk. If a man wanted to sit slumped on the curb that was his business. He was careful in picking up the lighter not to smear Otis's prints, and dropped it in the curb-sitter's pocket.

It cost him a slight pang to sacrifice the lighter. He lifted the body to its feet, walked it to the corner.

Otis was even lighter than his wife had been.

He propped the slain man up against a corner lamppost. Passing cars were infrequent here, so he couldn't afford to be choosy. But he had to wait for a driver not overly careful about slowing for a turn.

He let one car pass, two. Then a car came squealing around the corner at a furious spree. Before it straightened enough for its headlights to catch them in its sweep, Dunn hurled the slain man directly in its path. The toppling corpse flung out its hands realistically, like a man suddenly aware of oncoming death and trying to wave it away.

Then the screeching impact, glass and metal meeting living flesh and bone.

THE DETECTIVE was in the middle of a yawn, and failed to complete it properly. "Say, would you mind telling me again how it happened."

Dunn began again, careful not to let fear or irritation but only the shock natural to a man reliving sudden death show in his voice. Really, it had worked better than he had dared to hope. The driver had panicked, making this a hit-

run. So Dunn could mean it when he said he didn't mind telling the detective again exactly how it had happened.

". . . So I saw him ahead of me on the street and shouted to him to wait—"

"You shouted to him?"

"That's right. And he stopped, and turned and waited for me to catch up with him. He recognized me straight off. I handed him back his lighter and he thanked me. Then he seemed to remember something and asked me the time. I told him—"

"You told him?"

"That's right. And he said, 'Good Lord, I got to hurry to a radio and hear the fight—'"

"Hear the fight?"

"Bad echo in here."

"That's right. And that's when the guy started to run across the street."

The detective gave Dunn a look too long for comfort. He nodded slowly to himself. "We really have to look into this one. Suppose we begin by you turning out your pockets."

The monogram in Dunn's pocket felt as heavy as his heart, and his heart was stone and a force of furies was hammering insistently away at it.

"Why?"

"All that shouting and telling and hearing. I understand this Otis was as deaf as a post."

(Continued from
Other Side)

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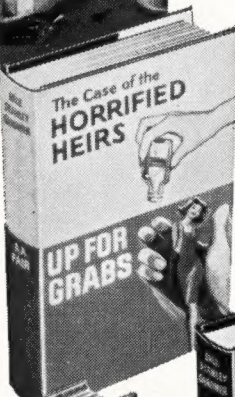
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